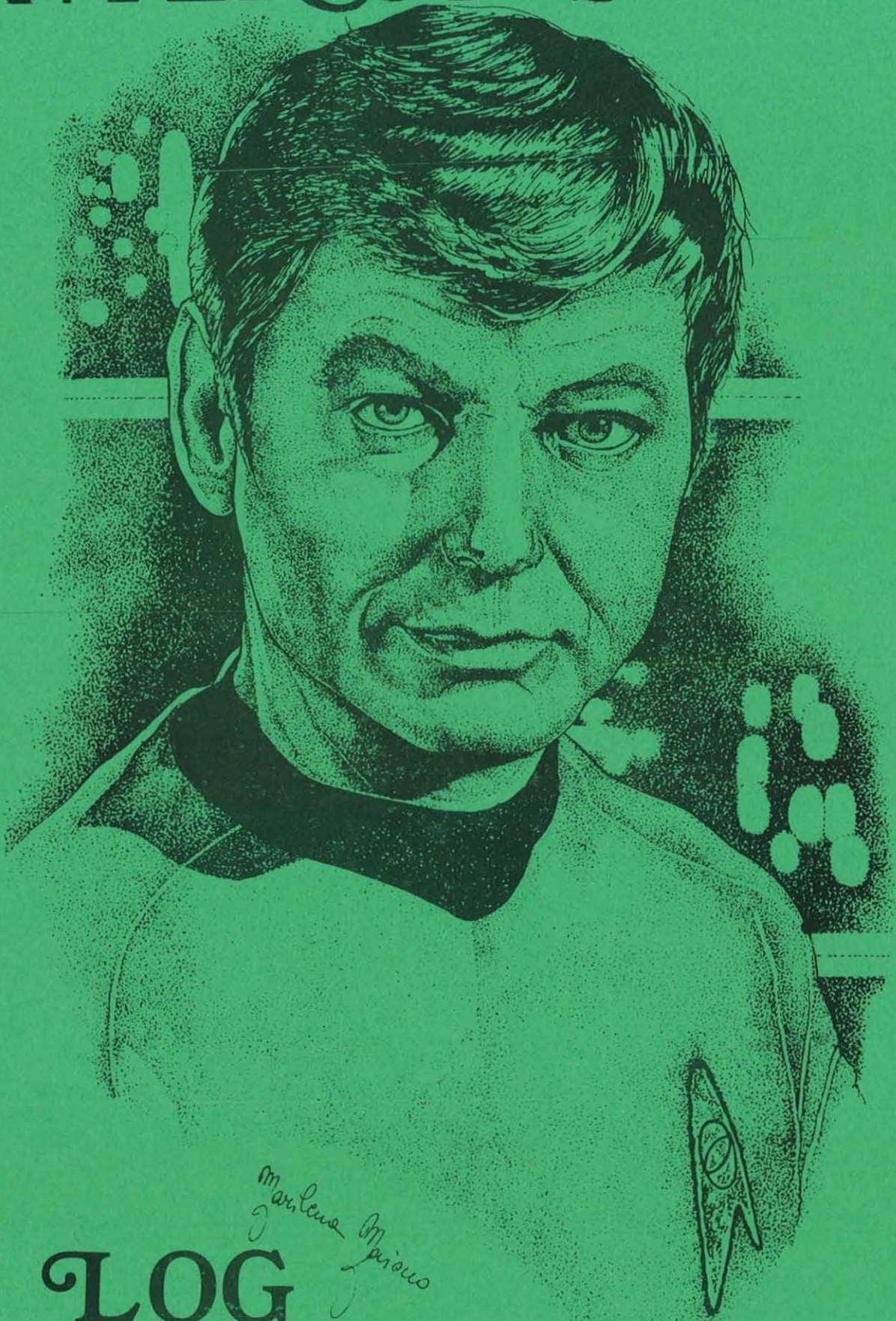


# ENTERPRISE ■ SCOTPRESS



LOG

ENTRIES

■ STAR TREK

FANZINE

■ 78 ■



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ScoTpress - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini, Janet Quarton & Shona

Hello. and welcome to Enterprise - Log Entries 78

For once we have broken one of our own rules; our first story in this issue is NOT Star Trek. However, I think it will be obvious why we have included it - at least, it will to those who have attended one of David Gerrold's writers' workshops, or who are familiar with his 'Shaggy Dog Story' which he read out at UFP con '86. Caroline has given a whole new meaning to the expression, 'Revenge is sweet'.

I must also mention the final story, 'A Glimpse of the Future', by Karen Sparks. This was sent to us in response to our mention of a proposed Next Generation zine. We felt that this particular story was best suited to Log Entries, but we have also received Next Generation material. The TNG zine will be called 'Make It So', and will appear as soon as we have enough contributions. Submissions will be gratefully received!

Karen is a new author to our pages, as are Sandy Catchick, Teresa Abbott and Krystia Baczala; we would like to welcome them, and hope to see more of their work in future.

To turn to another matter; with most British ST clubs, with the exception of BA, publishing quarterly newsletters, we feel that there is room for another bi-monthly newsletter. We have therefore been discussing the possibility of setting up a new STAR TREK club. Since the club would cover all aspects of STAR TREK - from original series to Next Generation, from fact to fiction - we have decided that the ideal name for the club would be 'IDIC'. We have several new ideas for the newsletter, including a couple which we think will be of special interest to zine readers. At the time of writing this we are investigating printers, prices and other such mundane matters; if you would be interested in 'IDIC' please contact:

Janet Quarton, 15 Letter Daill, Cairnbaan, Lochgilphead, Argyll, Scotland PA31 8SX

Please enclose an SAE (overseas addressed envelope, 2 IRCs or one loose airmail stamp). Further information will be sent as soon as details are finalised.

If we have any further information by the time we send you this a flyer will be enclosed.

We intend to continue with ScoTpress as a separate, independent press, maintaining the existing policy.

We welcome submissions of fiction, poetry and artwork for ScoTpress zines; either series-based for Log Entries, or 'Next Generation'-based for Make It So. We are looking for action-adventure stories, preferably with some character inter-relationship. Alternate universe stories are acceptable, but even these should not be movie-based, K/S, or involve the death of main characters, or be primarily about other ships. These are, after all, "The voyages of the Starship Enterprise..."

Submissions may be sent to either -

Sheila Clark, 6 Craigmill Cottages, Strathmartine, By Dundee, Scotland

Valerie Piacentini, 20 Ardrossan Road, Saltcoats, Ayrshire, Scotland



# MOMENT OF TRANSFORMATION

by

Caroline Nixon

Rabid Gelloid was not a nice man. He was a writer and imparter of the ars scriptoria, who ruled his Workshops with a rod of iron. Working on the principle of 'words will never hurt me', he had equipped himself with a meter or so of the cold, black, elf-busting metal which he used to beat up on his hapless students - who were first required to demonstrate their commitment to their Art by paying several hundred credits for the privilege.

Not that he could be accused of shirking his own responsibilities. He had fully accepted his mission to give each and every one of them their money's worth, and give them their money's worth he did; for cases where the rod failed, he kept a cat o' nine tails, a branding iron and a set of thumbscrews or two in constant readiness.

Nevertheless, over the last couple of days here on the bleak and characterless asteroid of Burrh Mingum, his sadistic ingenuity had been sorely tried. The air had been blue-hazed with brazier-smoke and invective, the sweat bursting from hitherto uncharted pores on his body as he laboured to evoke some bona-fide reaction, some flicker of honest-to-goodness gut feeling in the ranks of po-faced androids who had sat facing him for the past five or so interminable hours. And all this while fortified only by swigs of some noxious local Syntho-Froot cordial, whose monumental awfulness was in no way diluted by the water one was supposed to add to it!

It was Rabid's chosen method to conduct his classes in the form of a Socratean dialogue. By this means, each being contributed something to the consensus, each learning about himself and the others in the process; thus far, this session had been monologue all the uphill way. Not one of them had made a statement of total conviction, not one of them had ventured to challenge him on any point, however bitter, or however painful. They just sat there taking it all in, dull metal eyes regarding him from dull metal faces, even when he had pinned some of their number to the wall and left them dangling, torn and bloody, from their manacles, for the edification of their peers. He had brought forth his keenest pair of pincers, his cruellest iron maiden, to the accompaniment of his most spine-chilling imprecations and bloodcurdling chuckles, and all he could get from them was 'Yes, sir, no, Mr. Gelloid, are you sure your boots are quite clean now?'

Where was their fear? Where was their anger? Where their burning desire to Do As They Had Been Done By? He was almost prepared to settle for a little sincere boredom! How could such barely living dead aspire to the lofty task of Creation, when there could be no story without a character with a problem, no character without the demonstration of his emotions; and without the authentication of experience, those emotions were as mere marks on paper, signifying less than a laundry list. Yet not one of these automata here present seemed willing to admit to a single humanoid feeling of any kind; they were probably incapable of experiencing one, certainly in the real world, and he entertained little hope for

their imaginations.

O.D. 'd on soul-sickness and Syntho-Froot, he had sent out for hot coffee and sandwiches. As he sampled the barely-warm industrial slurry and world-weary sliver of Betelgeusian cheddar in glued card, he told himself that he should have known better. And not just about the catering.

Hadn't he had a foretaste, a forewarning of the debacle he now faced a brief two years ago on the neighbouring planetoid of Mahn Chrzesta; his first introduction to the utterly alien social rituals of the soi-disant sentient life-forms of this system? He still found it almost impossible to believe that his own race, the Janks of the Yuesse worlds, had its roots in these poker-spined B'Ritts, although the conclusion was inescapable. Their language was too amazingly similar to his own for coincidence, despite the baroque spelling, ossified grammar and antiquated pronunciation: the word 'wohtah' was eminently recognisable as 'water'; 'cuppah' was clearly cognate with his own 'cup o'cawfee', though the beverage was different in either case; and of course, if they preferred to be said to have got off behind the chemist's, rather than to have gotten off - or was it to have gotten it on? - in back of the drugstore, that was no-one's business but their own, as was where they chose to wear their suspenders.

And it wasn't only the language; religion too bore traces of long-standing ties. Were not the shrines to the Great M as ubiquitous on the B'Rittish streets as the ones that dogged his own doorstep on his home world of Ell-A? To clinch the matter, the two races had even been known to interbreed successfully, producing viable offspring without genetic intervention.

It was Rabid's personal theory that it was all a matter of Education. Transplant an unformed B'Rittish infant to the rich, nourishing soil of finger-paints and show and tell, and you would reap an outgoing, spontaneous, unreasonable adult, who laughed and cried and cussed with the best of them. Hadn't he seen the rigid conditioning begin to crack at the seams only the day before, when the half-grown offspring of one of his students was baulked of his desire for a few paltry coins? Whereas the forcing of a citizen of the System of the Free in the tight black plastic gro-bag of the B'Rittish schools system would produce a pot-bound android.

These B'Ritts were so used to repressing their natural, self-assertive impulses, all their budding, burgeoning shoots impacted, and then rotted down to bullshit: *I sort of seem to think I might perhaps like to write a novel, one of these days, but it's blood, sweat and tears, and there's a four-year-old on my back, a dog at my knee, and the cat won't get off the typewriter keys...* The leprous rot, the obscene virus gradually contracted their nervous systems, till even the bullshit was a compressed, fossilised mass, like lignite; dull, impassive and impassable. The deadly plague of Politeness, that was the B'Rittish Disease. Constipated was too constipated a word for them. They were haemorrhoidal!

For Chrissakes wake up, you... you atrophied assholes!

Blink. Purse. Thank you so much for those desperately enlightening words, Mr. Gelloid. Do come again.

He gave up.

It was a dangerously depleted Rabid that gained the sanctuary of his suite that evening, and he had rarely watched a door slide shut with more impatience. After the trial of the teach-in, there had been the tribulation of lunch, in the form of a veritable Boddhisatva of a lasagne he had met in its previous incarnations as pot roast, chipped steak and chilli con carne. Then, as if that had not been more than enough, he had been kept waiting to speak for untold aeons, while several hundred of these anal-hoarding kissing-cousins of his discussed first the pros and cons of umpteen supremely similar banners under which to assemble on future occasions, and then the projected dates and venues thereof, with mind-blowing courtesy. He had tried to ease his escalating discomfort by lying flat on his back on the platform, and his eye lit with much fellow-feeling on a bonsai'd S'Pielburgian mother ship, hanging forlornly from the ceiling like a beetle on a pin. He took a great many deep breaths as he counted its lustres; sixty-five thousand, eight hundred, seventy-three, one million, one hundred and one thousand, one hundred forty... the subsequent events had been a merciful blur.

Now, at long last, he was alone. He hurried through to the bedroom, easing open his collar, impatient to feel the cool bliss of air on his perspiring body. There beside the bed, he shucked off the stifling confines in one glorious burst of freedom. Rabid was himself again!

He scuttled through to the bathroom, heading for the wash-stand. His reflection regarded him anxiously from the mirror; the eyes were red and hot in the peaked face, his upper lip bristled, but that was only natural. His nose...

The door-signal cut into his deliberations like a buzz-saw. He sighed. B'Rittish manners hounded him to his very lair. Would it be one of the Committee, making sure he had everything he wanted - apart from a little time on his own? Or, even worse, one of his Workshop victims; the one who had stayed away that day to begin a novel, maybe, hoping to get in a little practice at having a story rejected? For which he would be gratefully thanked to within an inch of his life. What wouldn't he give for a bit of real, down-home profanity? For just someone to look him straight in the eye and say, 'Rabid, you are a rat.' It would be no more than God's own truth. Light glinted briefly on a tooth as the face in the mirror split in a sardonic smile.

Reluctantly, he turned and made his way back to the bedroom and the crumpled heap there on the carpet. In his weariness, his foot tangled in a treacherous snake of wire, the vidi-com lead, the flex from the drinks-selector. As he stumbled, some part of his body made inadvertent contact with a door-release.

It was one of his students indeed. She stood on the threshold, bug-eyed at the totally unexpected vision vouchsafed to her by the open bedroom door. "Mr. Gellold?"

Rabid moved forward, smiling sheepishly. "Jeez... what can I say? Even Captain Kirk gets caught with his britches down now and then."

She nodded, slowly. "I suppose I should have known. Especially after the shaggy dog story."

"Yeah, I guess it was a bit of a giveaway. Though I prefer the

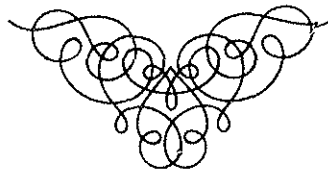
poppers, myself," he added, gesturing to the large mound of shirt and pant-clad pink plasti-skin in the next room. "Buttons are *slow*, and zippers have a habit of getting stuck in the nastiest places... But don't just stand there on your B'Rittish ceremony. Come on in."

There was an odd, glassy glint to her eyes, as if the already smothered B'Rittish life-force had been bundled down to even dustier depths. "Are you sure you mean that? After all, Chtorrans might not be the only worms to turn."

"Sure I'm sure." He waved expansively with a pink hand. "Help yourself!"

"In that case..." Her hand went to her neck, and there was a sick, spiked purring sound. The last things Rabid was aware of as the needle-sharp claws tore into his small grey belly were the pair of baleful, slit-pupilled eyes and his own frantic telepathic message to Harve and Harlan, his brothers-in-fur:

Beware of B'Ritts wearing Velcro!



## TWO BIRDS

(Spock to Sarek)

I am your son, last of our line,  
 Yet you despise me,  
 Though I have tried to learn the things  
 Our race must know.  
 Your discipline is rigid  
 And unyielding;  
 My moods are like the winds,  
 All highs and lows.  
 I cannot understand  
 Your ways of thinking;  
 The things I find so painful  
 You disdain.  
 The Chinese tie two birds,  
 Then send them flying.  
 I think our lives no better  
 Than that game!  
 Like the birds, we try to follow  
 Different flight paths,  
 And tear ourselves apart  
 Each time we try.  
 Don't you see that I *must* leave  
 Vulcan for Starfleet  
 So I'll never see the scorn  
 In your dark eyes!

Sheryl Peterson





# TIME TO THINK

I've been thinking a lot lately.  
Imminent death has that sort of effect on most people.  
Especially when the death in question happens to be your own.

As a doctor I've become accustomed to dealing with death.  
It's part of the job; goes with the shingle.  
Just like trying to learn not to care so much about the person that  
you're trying to help, so that when you can't help, it won't hurt so  
much.

But if you happen to be a sentimental Georgia-boy with a soft spot  
for anyone who needs help, then you care.

You bury yourself in research programmes to ignore it.  
You try to force it away by hiding it behind an alcoholic haze.  
You hide it behind a sarcastic tongue that whips out to flay at your  
friends if they get too close.

And your friends know exactly why and smile sadly (or simply raise an  
eyebrow), and wait for the wound to heal over.

I didn't expect this wound to heal.  
This foul disease is a proven 100% killer.

And here I am, in sickbay, recovering.

Doctors forget how much time patients spend thinking while they're in  
bed.

Most of the time there isn't a lot else to do, especially when the  
entire staff is watching you like a whole flock of hawks.

But then they're all good doctors and nurses, which means that they  
care.

Which brings me back to the point.

Tell me, Mr. Spock.

You just *happened* to be looking through the vast amount of  
knowledge stored in that Fabrini computer, and noticed, in  
amongst the extensive medical information, a disease which you  
thought looked something like that nasty one that I'd got; and  
you just *happened* to notice that there was a cure - all of it,  
naturally, recorded in Fabrini?

What's that you say? - A coincidence?

Oh.

Want to calculate the odds for me?

Brenda Kelsey



# SKRAT-BITE

by

Pac Deacon

Second Officer Kor-liss sat at the controls of Shrike, well pleased with himself. Back in the Captain's small cabin Kashin, his commanding officer, lay sprawled on his bed, dead to the world; the First Officer, Klot-bar, reclined beside him on the floor in a similar condition. It was highly unlikely that either would ever recover consciousness. Kor-liss himself had seen to that.

What a convenient military habit drunken orgies were! he mused, giving as they did much-needed opportunities to the ambitious. Kor-liss had wanted command ever since he could remember, and he had always known that for him there would be only one way to get it.

Merit was out; he had just scraped into military school by the skin of his repulsive-looking teeth: some eavesdropping and a little judicious blackmail, backed up by awe-inspiring muscle, had assured him of a reasonable passing-out grade.

Influence he had none to wield; of father unknown, he had been raised by a doting but illiterate mother who worked as a cleaner at a military base on Irgalshan, a small satellite planet of the Empire. He supposed she still did, when he gave her a thought at all. How pleased he had been to turn his back on that place! He had walked out without a look behind, his whole mind bent on solving the problem of how to get his boots on the next rung of the ladder to success and power.

By the well-tried method of using other men's fear and self-interest (Kor-liss fancied himself as a judge of men) he had got himself posted aboard Shrike, one of the smallest but newest ships of the Imperial Fleet. These 'skrats' were experimental, and made up for their lack of size by remarkable speed of manoeuvre, and their spindle shape, which made them a difficult target to hit, and in certain circumstances even for sensors to pin-point accurately until it was too late. And as crew space had been sacrificed to fire power, they packed a punch out of all proportion to their insignificant appearance.

In fact, a 'skrat' was the nearest thing in Terran terms to a mosquito: its bite was as deadly, but acted faster. Command of one was already a much-coveted honour - dangerous, obviously, but promising unlimited possibilities to the right man. Kashin had not been the right man - he had let the honour go to his head too soon, and power had quickly slipped through his stiffening fingers.

Shrike, together with her sister ships Skua, Shark and Squall, had been spat out from the vast hangar deck of the Klingon carrier Stercorax to quarter the surrounding area of space in quest of likely victims - transports, lone pirates and traders, small Federation ships, and the like. The rule of the hated Federation had no force out here; those Starfleet vessels which had occasion to pass this way might therefore be attacked with impunity, and Kor-liss yearned in particular for such an encounter. To destroy one, or better still, return with one as a prize... that would be glory indeed! Besotted with dreams of grandeur he even aspired to taking on a Starship,

but he had heard that they were few and far between. Still, convinced that nothing was impossible to a Klingon, he had spent several hours absorbed in poring over the plans of all known Federation vessels, until he knew by heart the location of each type's most vital part - its engine room. Strike there with sufficient power, and any ship would lie at your mercy.

The only thing he could not understand was why the Federation allowed such information to be made available all over the galaxy to all who might take an interest. However, it was enough for him that they did: now, the moment was surely near when he might take advantage of the enemy's folly, and use the power that he had just assisted Fate to put into his hands.

Just when the monotony of uneventful patrol was beginning to get on Kor-liss' nerves, Lt. Krote, his navigator, called out,

"Moving body detected 500,000 kilometers dead ahead, Second Officer, sir."

"Forget Second Officer," spat Kor-liss. "You'll call me Captain from now on, all you curs! You'll find that's what I am. Watch your screen, Navigator! Report specific details on moving body - and jump to it!"

"Yessir... Captain," stammered Krote. Behind his back covert but significant glances were exchanged by the rest of the small bridge squad. One or two of them had seen this coming. All would certainly claim that they had - later.

"Too small for an asteroid... Captain - but if that's a ship, it's a large one."

"Hold course, Krote, till we get a closer look. This may be the chance we've all been hoping for, eh, men?"

Kor-liss' heavy boot soles scraped along the floor as he shifted with excitement in the command chair. His fingers were twitching with the barely controllable desire to be on those torpedo buttons. Missile launch from a skrat was the Captain's prerogative - another reason why the position was so sought-after.

Sensing its master's emotions, the 'mostel' crouched at his feet growled softly; Kor-liss slid the fingers of his left hand down inside its collar and shook its head from side to side to elicit the louder, fiercer growling that excited his mood even further. He had kept the creature openly on the carrier without infringing regulations, and had smuggled it on board Shrike just before launch, having already laid his plans for his seizure of command. Skun-Min (or Skun, as he thought of it most of the time) was to be the status symbol he needed to get him the respect of the crew, and when necessary put the fear of Kor-liss into them with a vengeance, for it had vicious teeth and an unlovely brownish-yellow hide, and stank like all its tribe when roused to action.

Kor-liss remembered Kar-wath, his role-model at military school: three years older, from a wealthy and influential family, Kar-wath had dominated his fellow students by sheer brute presence, but what had made him the object of particular fear and envy had been the pair of enormous, ill-tempered animals which went with him everywhere and rendered any other form of bodyguard quite

superfluous. Kor-liss was not aware that he *admired* Kar-wath, admiration not being a Klingon weakness, but he certainly wanted to be like him. The pay of a Second Officer on a skrat would not of course cover the cost of feeding even one of Kar-wath's beasts, so Kor-liss had settled for Skun-Min, who had his own way of frightening off his master's enemies, and who was not at all particular about what he ate. When this mission was successfully completed, Kor-liss intended to replace Skun with a more splendid animal - of what species he had not yet decided, but certainly one that would be more appropriate to the rank and resources he was sure would very soon be his.

"Well, Krote?" Kor-liss was growing impatient with his slow subordinate.

"It... it *is* a ship, Captain - but I don't recognise its type yet. Not one of ours, nor an ally, sir. Shall I go on holding course straight ahead, sir?"

"You'll hold course till you can give me some information worth having," snarled Kor-liss. Thumbing the intercom switch he bawled, "Engine room? Possible enemy sighted ahead. Give me maximum speed till further notice. Captain out." Flicking the switch off, and without turning his head, he snapped, "Communications! Put screen ahead on visual, but on no account make auditory contact."

"Aye aye, *Captain*." The junior officer, cringing, obeyed.

James T. Kirk sat comfortably in the command chair of Enterprise, wearing his on-duty, purposeful, this-is-your-inspiring-leader expression. He was actually quite unconscious of this: with the years it had become automatic. In reality his mind was temporarily on vacation, savouring private and all-but-total recall of the pleasant period recently spent in the vicinity of a certain pleasure planet. Around him his bridge crew were being their usual efficient selves, but working with that little bit of extra pep and enthusiasm that hinted at a well-spent and thoroughly satisfactory shore leave. And so far the voyage home to Starbase Four had been carefree and without incident.

Suddenly Kirk saw Sulu's shoulders stiffen as the helmsman bent forward tensely over his console.

"Readings coming in from a point dead ahead, sir. They indicate a very small object, but it's moving towards us at a most unusual rate."

"Keep monitoring, Mr. Sulu. Mr. Spock - identification?"

"My sensors confirm an object approaching us at high speed, Captain. No deviation as yet from its original course." He paused. "Life-form readings coming in now. Not an inhabited asteroid: presumably therefore a vessel of some kind."

"Provenance, Mr. Spock?"

"Insufficient data as yet, Captain. Of no listed design. Form is spindle-like - unusual for a vessel in private ownership; suited to rapid manoeuvre, with obvious tactical advantages, but of limited cruising range, I should say. I am forced to the conclusion that this is a fighting craft, Captain; its speed of approach is quite



remarkable. A closer look will be most illuminating."

"Illuminate *me*, Mr. Spock. Those life-forms - what are they?"

Spock half turned towards his Captain, his eyebrows raised a fraction. "Klingon, sir - naturally."

"Naturally?"

"Sir, the laws of mathematical probability show that periods of peace and success are normally of limited duration, and are ended sooner than one would hope by a gathering of the forces naturally hostile to them. And I think it unlikely that the Romulans would break the present truce in this manner."

Kirk stared at him, temporarily lost for words. *Mathematical probability my foot*, he thought. *I know what it is: he's had a hunch, and can't recognise it. And what does he mean by talking about hope?*

Aloud he said, turning to Uhura, "The usual, please, Lieutenant."

Uhura could have hugged him for that, so much less galling to her than the hated phrase itself. "H.F. open, sir," she responded smartly. "Translator on."

"Put screen ahead on visual, Mr. Sulu."

"Aye aye, sir."

The viewscreen sprang to life. Hurtling straight for them at awesome speed was a small circular shape with a dark dot in the centre. The circle grew larger by the second. Kirk rose from the command chair and advanced to confront the moving image.

"This is James T. Kirk, commanding the Starship Enterprise of the United Federation of Planets. Please identify yourselves."

He waited for a reply, but none came. The seconds ticked by.

"No response on any frequency, sir," reported Uhura.

"We are on a peaceful mission - repeat, peaceful mission - to Federation Starbase Four. We intend you no harm. You are on a collision course with our vessel. Request you modify course immediately - repeat, immediately."

The oncoming craft continued to ignore Kirk completely. It held relentlessly on its way.

On board Shrike Kor-liss sat gazing in dumb amazement at the vision which filled his viewscreen. So *that* was a Starship! He felt almost awe-struck for a moment at her sheer size. But what a fussy, over-complicated shape! Putting your command crew in a pimple on top of an inverted saucer struck him as downright silly, and as for the bits that stuck out behind...!\* Well, never mind, what mattered was

(\*Note: The author accepts no responsibility for this Klingon's opinions.)

the heart of the beast - the engines - and those he thought he had located. The tomfool enemy Captain had just very kindly confirmed his course for him, and *that* he was about to change in accordance with his own pre-conceived plan. His reply to Kirk's message would not be a verbal one. Let the conceited Fed whistle a bit longer... He'd know what the answer was when it hit him, fatally, in a vital spot...

"Hold course dead ahead, Krote. On my signal, depress horizontally two degrees - *now!*"

Shrike's pointed nose dipped.

"Rectify to level out - *now!*"

Travelling at just over Warp One, Shrike flashed beneath her huge opponent, disappearing at the last second from the starship's viewscreen.

"Helm, 90 degrees starboard!" snapped Kor-liss. "And again! Set return course for missiles launched at rear port side of enemy hull to strike at 40 degrees. Arm torpedoes!"

"Aye aye, Captain," two voices chorused dutifully.

The greatest moment in Kor-liss' career was upon him. He was at the highest pitch of excitement and self-confidence. Here was the prey he had dreamed of, and he had her, all unsuspecting, at his mercy.

Kirk stared in some fascination at the strange, unresponsive little vessel. He did not usually distrust his First Officer's data - nevertheless, could this insignificant-looking craft really be a Klingon fighter?

While he hesitated Uhura spoke. "Still no response, sir. I don't believe he's going to alter course."

Kirk was just opening his mouth to order evasive action when the other ship, as if it had anticipated him, vanished from Enterprise's viewscreen.

"Rear screens on, Mr. Sulu," Kirk said swiftly. "Put ship on Yellow Alert, Lieutenant."

"Aye aye, sir."

The starfield before them changed. There was the foreign craft, receding fast. As they strained their eyes after it they saw it turn sharply and swing back in a semi-circle, heading for them again, but this time at an acute angle to their main hull.

"Course extrapolation suggests engine room as probable target, Captain."

"To ram, or launch missiles, Spock?"

"Unknown, sir, but time is short. Recommend raising shields without delay."

Kirk had to agree. "Put us on Red Alert, Lieutenant. Prepare

phasers." The Red Alert sirens began to wail all over the ship. "Raise shields!"

But that last order came just a quarter of a second too late.

Eyes fixed on the viewscreen, finger on the torpedo button ready to fire, Kor-liss strained forward in his command chair. Any second now... any second now... His left boot scraped along the floor, making sparks fly; much of his weight was resting on its inside edge. He half rose from his seat. Any second now... Any sec -

"Aargh-ra!"

The heavy boot had crushed Skun's paw. Skun reared up in agony and sank his teeth into Kor-liss' leg just above the boot top. His master, grunting with pain and surprise, lurched forward onto his console, jarring himself so considerably that he bit through the tip of his own tongue. Before he could recover his balance his forefinger had rammed the firing button down. Away sped the twin torpedoes, a fraction of a second earlier than was really desirable.

Kor-liss sank back, cursing and spitting blood, into his chair, and dealt the now whimpering creature at his side a head blow that stretched it senseless on the floor. Looking down, he saw that blood was also seeping through his trouser leg, and his calf ached as though it was on fire. However, what concerned him most of all was the path of his missiles: would they find their target, or vanish uselessly into the depths of space? Four still remained, but he had now lost the advantage of surprise. Return to the carrier without either ammunition or prize to show in exchange would mean a year's enforced service without pay, as well as the little matter of demotion from a position which was not officially his in the first place. It was a prospect that would not bear thinking about.

But even as he groaned inwardly a miracle took place before his eyes. A red glow blossomed like a summer rose on the starship's hull. Then it seemed to grow a white stalk. Kor-liss could hardly contain his savage glee. She was losing atmosphere!

Behind him he heard a collective snarl of approval. Then, to the disgust of them all, the stalk was cut off short. The hole was already sealed. Confound them! Kor-liss raged to himself; now he would have to find a new tactic. He must show his crew he really was the stuff that Captains are made of, for otherwise...

On the Enterprise chaos had provisionally replaced order. Even as Kirk spoke his words had been swallowed up in the roar of missiles exploding aft. The ship lurched and juddered, throwing its Human occupants all over the place. On the bridge only Spock remained standing, having learned from past experience how to anticipate the event. He had wedged a shoulder in a convenient cranny above his science station, positioned his feet well apart, and gripped the edge of his console with both hands and all his considerable Vulcan strength. Thus, when the ship had finally stopped shuddering and heaving, he was the only person among the bridge crew to emerge completely unscathed. The rest picked themselves up off the floor and limped back to their places, feeling their bruises tenderly and moaning softly.

Kirk, who had been thrown on his knees in front of his own command chair, had had the presence of mind to cling on to its arms as if for dear life, and was now hauling himself up by them to get back on his feet. He rubbed a painful shoulder and looked around at his people.

"Anyone seriously hurt?"

A chorus of "No, sir", punctuated by a single "Not really, Captain" in dulcet female tones, and a solitary "Negative, Captain" from his left, put his mind at rest.

"Status report, Mr. Spock?"

"Just coming in, sir... Main hull has sustained a direct hit amidships."

"Can we still raise shields?"

"Affirmative, Captain."

"Then do it at once, Spock. Uhura - let me have Scotty on the intercom."

"Shields up now, sir."

"Mr. Scott for you, Captain," added Uhura.

"Captain Kirk!" The familiar reproachful brogue filled the bridge. "Whatever was that that hit us? I've got three banged heads down here, and a probable dislocated knee, from my laddies being flung off their feet and up against their ain machinery. Ye didna' give us much warning this time, sir."

"Get them to sickbay, Scotty. Let's be glad it's no worse. Any engine damage? Where exactly did the missiles hit?"

"That I canna say, Captain, but we were lucky - the engines have taken no harm yet. I can give ye any speed ye like to ask for."

"Fine, Scotty. I'll get back to you. Kirk out."

"Captain," Spock said, "the commissariat has just reported that the outer hull was breached in the kitchen storage area. Minimal loss of atmosphere - emergency doors sealed the hole two seconds after impact. Damage to glass and other fragile items has occasioned cuts to some crew members who were on duty there at the time. Sickbay has the situation in hand."

"Right! Now, Spock, he's going to come back and try again. Where does your logic suggest he'll aim this time?"

"There is little logic in Klingon thinking, sir. They have one-track minds, as you are aware. I am sure his target will not have changed. I would predict an exactly similar attack to the first, but probably against our starboard side."

"I agree, Spock. Mr. Chekov, arm rear phasers. We'll try to give him a taste of his own medicine."

Kirk and Sulu watched the rear viewscreen like hawks.

"There he is, Captain! Just starting another run! Starboard



side it is."

"Ready to fire phasers on command, Mr. Sulu."

"Yes, sir!" Sulu froze in concentration, his eyes sparkling.

The tiny ship on the screen raced on towards them.

"Fire!"

Sulu instantly obeyed, but Shrike at Warp 1.5 was already inside phaser reach. The next moment Enterprise shuddered again, but the shock was minor and less prolonged.

"Only one hit, Captain - the second torpedo missed us outright," reported Spock. "Deflector shields holding. No external damage."

"A third attempt imminent, do you think, Spock?"

"Klingons are notoriously superstitious, Captain." There was a glint in his eye which Kirk found positively exhilarating.

"I presume that means yes. Well, I have an idea. Re-arm phasers just in case, Mr. Chekov, but I think a little surprise is in order for our dumb friend out there."

The self-appointed captain of the Shrike could feel an attack of blind rage coming on. A second failure - worse than the first! Only one hit, and he had learned the hard way that his missiles were no match for a starship's shields. There was one consolation, though - Shrike's speed had made the Fed's phaser crew look like beginners.

And he still had two torpedoes left. This time he would attack directly from the rear. He did not really care to contemplate yet the choice that would face him in consequence of a third cock-up: virtual suicide by returning to base, or actual suicide by ramming the enemy ship... He gave the order to circle back for the start of his final run, crossing his fingers beneath his console, where his restive crew could not see the gesture.

Kirk spoke over his shoulder to Uhura. "Contact transporter room, Lieutenant. I want rear tractor beams activated immediately."

"Yes, sir." She punched the requisite buttons, then waited a second. "Tractor beams on now, sir."

Spock looked across at his Captain. Their eyes met and locked. Then the Vulcan gave a slight nod and turned back to his blue-lit viewer.

Kirk said softly, to no-one in particular, "I have a hunch" - he savoured the word - "that we are going to see the mosquito dart right into the candle flame - and when he does, we've got him."

His crew held their breaths. Everyone except Spock gazed fixedly at the big viewscreen, willing it to happen. They saw the enemy swing round and come in towards their stern at mind-boggling speed. Then suddenly it became a blur radiating a fuzzy halo.

A voice spoke from the intercom. "Transporter room to bridge. Transporter room - "

"Kirk here. Go ahead."

"Lieutenant Kyle reporting, sir. Our tractor beam has locked on to a spindle-shaped metallic object, length about twenty-five meters, estimated weight - "

"Never mind that, Lieutenant. Good work. You've hooked the Klingon vessel. Now keep her in the beam. She'll certainly exert reverse pull to try and escape, but she doesn't stand a chance against our superior energy output. Just be ready for the odd jerk when it comes, Mr. Kyle. Kirk out."

"Jerk, Captain?" said Spock, amazed. "You don't imagine - "

"Just an old fishing expression, Spock. Don't take it literally."

"Brilliant trick, Captain," exclaimed Sulu. He was positively bubbling.

"What next, sir?" asked Chekov eagerly.

"What next, Ensign?" replied Kirk, smiling at the young officer's enthusiasm. "Well, we just tow our friend along to Starbase 4, where he can explain his behaviour, and you and Mr. Spock will have a chance to satisfy your curiosity about his interesting little craft."

Chekov went pink with pleasure. Meeting Spock's impassive gaze, he felt not a whit abashed. He was learning.

"Oh my God!"

It was Uhura's voice. They all turned instinctively at the sound, and a fearful sight met their eyes.

Dr. McCoy had come on to the bridge. His arms, hands and face were covered with dull, reddish-brown stains, his pale blue medical tunic was a shambles. There were smears of red on his trousers. Quite illogically, and in sharp contrast to his shocking appearance, his face bore a cheerful smile.

"Well, Jim, thought you'd like to know everything's under control down below. Not too many casualties, considering. Mainly cuts from flying glassware. Got a few orderlies clearing up the mess where the two torpedoes hit. Can't say I envy *them*!" He grinned around at the circle of disbelieving faces. "What's the matter with you all? Am I a ghost or something?"

Kirk found his voice. "If you want the truth, Bones, you look like something out of an abattoir. And what *is* that abominable smell?"

A hysterical giggle from Uhura answered him. She had just realised what the smell was. She was nearest to its source, but noses were being wrinkled in disgust all round the bridge.

"Bones?"

"Smell, Jim? What smell? You don't mean the blood, surely?"

"No, I do not mean the blood! There's something else, stronger - it seems familiar..."

Uhura could bear it no longer. "Captain! It's ketchup! The doctor's covered in ketchup from the kitchen! I don't believe there's any blood at all! He's just putting us on!"

"I'll have you know, Lieutenant," said the indignant McCoy, "that there's more than enough of the real thing under this revolting mess. My patients were drenched in ketchup and sauce and gravy, and I've had the devil of a time extracting bits of glass from them that I could barely see for the decor. You'll find I blend in very nicely with the refectory walls, too, when you have time to tear yourselves away from your war-games and go down and look at them."

His last words were almost drowned in the relieved outburst of laughter which ensued. Suddenly, however, the general merriment was cut short by a most disappointing event.

On Shrike's bridge things were going from bad to worse. Kor-liss' crewmen, once it became apparent that Enterprise had caught them in her tractor beam like a fly in honey, were on the point of open mutiny. By sheer lung-power and the energy of desperation he bent them one last time to his will.

"Get every ounce of power to those engines!" he bawled over the intercom to his invisible engineer. "Apply maximum thrust away from the enemy ship, and keep it up - we *have* to break free!"

"Maximum thrust already being exerted, Captain."

Kor-liss glared at his screen. Shrike was straining like a dog on a leash. Was it his imagination or was the temperature increasing? They did not appear to have moved one inch further away from their giant captor.

"Engine-room!" bellowed Kor-liss. "What's going on down there? You'll have to do better than this if you don't want to face a court-martial, all of you, when we get back!"

"I can't push the engines any further, sir, without risking an explosion!"

"Don't give me excuses!" raged Kor-liss, beside himself with frustration. "Cut down all other energy expenditure - do you hear me? *All!* - except life-support to the bridge - *and* the engine-room," he added as an afterthought. "Get me more pull, or we're finished; do you understand, you incompetent idiot?"

His bridge squad, hardened villains though they were, paled at this callous order, but realising that their own lives were on the line, they sullenly sat mum. The bridge lights flickered ominously, then came on again, less bright. The expected drop in temperature did not occur. Instead, the fog all around them was getting thicker. Kor-liss, fuming with impatience, did not notice the faint wisps of smoke curling round his ankles.

The tormented little ship vibrated suddenly from bow to stern, as if gathering her strength for one final almighty heave. Kor-liss' heart leapt up: they were going to make it! Then he was blinded by an appalling flash of light. Shrike's over-taxed engines had blown

up. The consciousness of Kor-liss and his crew was instantly swallowed up in the deafening roar of dissolution. The minute fragments which a split second ago had been a ship and her complement now sped outwards and away from each other into the cold void of space, where they would travel forever, unless trapped by some planet's field and burned to nothing in its envelope of gas.

Thus faded one petty tyrant's dreams of glory. Others no doubt would come after him, for history teaches us that men - and Klingons - do not learn from the mistakes of those who have gone before.

"Captain! Look!" When the dazzling starburst appeared on the viewscreen of the Enterprise Chekov's hand had instinctively flown to cover his eyes. Now he removed it, rather sheepishly. "That was the enemy ship! They must have chosen to self-destruct rather than be taken in as a prize!"

A momentary hush fell on the starship's bridge.

"That's Klingon honour," murmured Sulu. "They couldn't get away, so they had to do it."

"Or they over-estimated the capacity of their engines," replied Kirk. "Their captain was too obstinate to admit to himself that he had bitten off more than he could chew."

"And his crew have had to pay for it with their lives," said McCoy bitterly.

"A regrettable outcome in every way," observed Spock. "We shall perhaps never be one hundred per cent certain that it was an officially recognised Klingon vessel, and we have lost all chance of acquiring information that would have been useful to the Federation concerning its design, energy source, and military capabilities when in experienced hands."

"You green-blooded, cold-hearted, pointy-eared alien!" exploded the outraged McCoy. "Living beings never have meant as much to you as machines and computers, have they? If this is what the worship of logic leads to, I want no part of it!"

"Your peril is minimal, Doctor," replied Spock coolly. "The deaths you are so nobly deploring might have been avoided if the Klingon captain had exercised a modicum of logic. Pride, hate, ambition - in other words, emotion, sir, the emotion you are so fond of lauding to the skies, was the cause of all this waste."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" Kirk assumed his role of buffer state with the ease of long practice. "Nothing we say now can alter what has happened. In any case it seems to me that you are both right."

At this astonishing assertion Spock's eyebrows shot up into his hair: McCoy's jaw dropped wide open, temporarily silencing him, and his eyes began to bulge. Kirk plunged on before they could recover themselves sufficiently to resume hostilities.

"Mr. Spock, please initiate sensor analysis of the debris and radiation left by the explosion. We may be able to discover something, however trifling, from which a few deductions can be made. And Bones, would you please return to Sickbay and get into a fresh uniform? The aura you are carrying around with you is starting



to spoil my appetite for lunch."

Two voices replied - reluctantly? - "Aye aye, sir," to a muffled accompaniment of "Hear hear!" from McCoy's long-suffering colleagues. He departed; Spock turned to his scanners; peace, in every sense of the word, was once again restored. As Enterprise continued on her majestic course towards Starbase Four, her Captain allowed himself a few wistful reflections on the recent skirmish. He too felt some regret at the dreadful fate that had overtaken the enemy vessel, but most of all he felt relieved and thankful that his own personnel had escaped relatively unharmed. Now, if all their future troubles could be as minor and as short-lived as that little gnat-bite...



## PARALLEL LINES

(Inspired by the story 'The Dissimilar Parallel' by Valerie Piacentini in Mission Review 1.)

Waiting for the signal,  
Adjusting dress and thoughts;  
A new Captain cannot change the past, but  
May put in doubt the future.

My future may not lie with him, but  
The pain of rejection can no longer hurt.  
My defences are now too strong.  
Long ago was there a way left open;

The man who could have entered  
Refused to read the signs,  
So painfully the wall grew taller,  
Each layer a rejection as a friendship died unborn.

The shell around me grew  
Stronger than a deflector shield,  
So strong that no man could enter now  
To find the hidden me.

The signal comes. The transporter hums to life.  
A new Captain claims his ship.  
With smiling hazel eyes he looks my way, and  
The shell begins to

c  
r  
a  
c  
k.

Maureen Frost

# A TASTE OF HUNNNY

by

Brenda Kelsey

The bridge crew of the Enterprise were still tense, still reacting to the events of the previous days. Their Captain's obsession with the idea that the cloud was a semi-sentient parasite had placed an enormous strain on first their loyalty to him, then their nerves as the final confrontation had taken place. Now they were, each in their own way, trying to adjust back to what passed as normal on the Enterprise.

McCoy, leaning lazily against the bridge railing to exchange a few words with Scott, eyed the people present with a worried frown. Professionally the whole situation stank, and he could think of no way to lighten the mood. He looked across the width of the bridge to Spock who, he noted, was also surveying the bridge crew. His body language displayed his tension just as clearly as the Humans' did. They exchanged looks, then McCoy saw Spock's face twitch as Kirk, who had been leaning forward to talk to Garrovick, straightened and automatically pulled at the back of his perennially too-short tunic. In an instant the expression was gone, leaving Spock's face as vanilla-bland as ever. It left McCoy intensely curious and a little worried, because what he thought he had seen in that fleeting moment was gleeful recognition; and Spock had known Kirk for years! All most peculiar.

Uhura gritted her teeth and kept plugging away at her assigned duties. Unfortunately, the harder she tried the worse the muddle got. In sheer desperation she looked pleadingly at Spock, and sighed in relief as the Vulcan not only understood but oh-so-casually joined her at her console. She quickly explained, and Spock joined her in sorting the chaos into order.

"Thank you," she whispered. "I'd have hated to hand that mare's nest over to Palmer to deal with."

Spock noted her drawn face, inclined his head, handed her note-board back to her and returned to his station as inconspicuously as he had left it.

Uhura glanced at her hitlist of 'Things that *must* be done' and started crossing off the completed items. When she reached the last line she had to read it twice before she believed that it was there. In Spock's neat script were the words, 'Happy Windsday'.

She stared fixedly at her console for several minutes, doing routine jobs, before she dared to look at the board again. The words, sharp and clear, were still there. Puzzled, she looked at Spock and realised that he was wearing his very best 'Little boy totally innocent of any misdeeds' look. The words rang a faint chord in her memory. They were somehow connected with a little boy. Intrigued and diverted, Uhura settled down to her duties again, totally unaware that all her tension was gone.

McCoy watched the silent ballet and was also intrigued. He had no idea how Spock had managed that piece of magic, but he approved wholeheartedly because he now had one person less to worry about.

The next twenty minutes or so passed quietly enough. No alien ships attacked them, no suns in the vicinity suddenly went nova and the bridge crew continued to behave with their normal decorum, if slightly more silently than usual.

Uhura idly scratched at her head with the blunt end of a stylus. The meaning of the two words continued to be elusive, and she refused as a matter of personal honour to use the computer to solve the puzzle Spock had set for her. She shot a venomous glance at Spock, who was concentrating on a fluctuating sensor reading and so missed seeing it, and muttered, "If only I could think!" She glanced guiltily at Kirk, worried that she had been overheard.

Kirk was studying an engineering report with Scott. He was resting his head on one fist, elbow on the arm of his chair, with his head bent slightly forwards and down, looking at the diagram that Scott was earnestly describing to him. *Thinker*, she thought as the classic pose registered.

The description finally sparked off the connection and as she realised the meaning of Spock's cryptic message laughter bubbled up unstoppably within her. Wide-eyed, she stared at Spock, then resolutely turned back to her console, determined not to give in to her mirth - at least, not on the bridge with Captain Kirk thoughtfully occupying the centre seat.

She managed tolerably well, really. Only the occasional snort betrayed her struggle, drawing enquiring glances from Kirk (which she ignored) and curious attention from the rest of the bridge crew, with the sole exception of Spock, who knew exactly what was going on and why, and wouldn't have deigned to display his curiosity so conspicuously even if he hadn't.

When her relief finally arrived Uhura handed over to her without a flaw, except for the slightest of tremors in her voice. She could see, out of the corner of her eye, McCoy gathering himself, waiting to pounce, and turned to look at Spock for the first time in over an hour. Spock was now wearing what she had categorised as his 'maniac-elf' look, a sure sign to those who knew that something had made a direct hit on the Vulcan's non-existent funny bone. Spock was smoothly finishing the hand over of the science console to Chekov and she waited for him, deliberately ignoring McCoy's surreptitious attempts to attract her attention.

So it was that Uhura had Spock's silent and admittedly cautious support when McCoy made his move.

"Are you all right, Uhura?" he asked a trifle anxiously.

"Why yes, thank you." She fluttered her eyelashes coyly at him.

"That's fine then." McCoy risked a glance at Kirk, who was again bending forward to talk to Garrovick. "What are you going to do now?" he asked softly.

Uhura fluttered her eyelashes at him again, and replied equally softly but just loudly enough for Scott to hear, "Why, I'm going to have dinner with Christopher Robin. Aren't I?" Uhura smiled lovingly up at Spock.

Spock rose nobly to the occasion and acknowledged his fate. "Yes, Kanga," he said equably.

Uhura patted McCoy's cheek and said, "Happy Windsday, Owl!" before joining Spock in the waiting lift. The stunned looks on the faces of McCoy and Scott finally broke through her control, but fortunately the lift was already carrying her and Spock away from the bridge, and danger.

McCoy was not so fortunate. "Christopher Robin? Kanga?" he asked Scott.

"Owl?" replied Scott. "They're characters from a bairns' story, aren't they?"

"Oh yes!" said McCoy. "Quite a famous one. It's... Umm..." McCoy searched his memory to recall the name. At that precise moment he was looking at Kirk straightening upright in the centre seat and pulling ineffectively at the back of his uniform top. The memory, and the resemblance, struck McCoy even as it had struck Spock, but because he was only Human and not blessed with Spock's self-control, he was quite unable to stop himself hooting with laughter.

"Leonard?" asked Scott worriedly, and when McCoy waved in the direction of the centre seat he too realised Uhura's meaning.

Kirk swivelled round to survey his Chief Medical Officer and Chief Engineer. McCoy was sitting on the bridge steps, his arms wrapped round the upright, laughing uproariously. As he watched Scott sat down, missed the chair completely, and ended up on the deck with his head buried against his knees, also laughing loudly.

Kirk looked inquiringly at Scott's relief, who responded, confused, with a blank-faced shrug. Shaking his head, Kirk swivelled his chair to face the large screen and said, "Mr. Sulu, you have the con."

"Yes, Captain," responded Sulu, glancing over his shoulder at the loud portion of the bridge.

"Mr. Garrovick, perhaps you'd care to join me for dinner?"

"My pleasure, Captain."

Kirk entered the lift, affecting to ignore the by now almost hysterical duo. With him safely gone, Sulu and Chekov summarily abandoned their posts and went to sort out their senior officers. The lesser ranks kept a clear - and to them healthy - distance.

When McCoy and Scott were finally back on their feet Sulu asked, "What's so funny?"

"It depends on your sense of humour," McCoy said weakly. "Oh lord!" It suddenly occurred to him just who had started the joke.

"Assume dat ve do?" suggested Chekov, supporting him and quite oblivious of the reason for McCoy's renewed mirth.

"D'ya think that we should, Leonard?" choked Scott as he wiped away his tears.

"Naw," said McCoy, deciding to maintain a discrete silence until he could corner a certain Vulcan privately, "but seeing as how... he's left... Tigger and Piglet here to mind the Hundred Acre Wood, what say that we go feed ourselves?"



"That's a guid idea, Owl."

"After you, Eeyore."

Left alone by the lift, Sulu and Chekov exchanged comprehensive looks before succumbing to hilarity themselves.

Some considerable time later, still giggling, Chekov approached Sulu, who was sitting a little uncomfortably in the Captain's chair.

"Do you think dat... he knows?"

"No!" said Sulu definitely.

There was a short pause before Chekov ventured to ask as casually as he could, "Do you think dat ve should tell him?"

Sulu said, "No," again very definitely, then continued, "It's really up to you, but I want advance warning of at least a month if you do decide to tell him. I don't want to be on the same ship as him when you do. Hell - I don't want to be in the same *universe*!"

Chekov considered the probable reaction of his leader and was struck by the profound wisdom of Sulu's instinctive insight. "Yes, I can see dat it would be... unwise."

"Suicidal," said Sulu with feeling. "I wonder who thought of that one?" he asked.

But he never did find out.



## HOMELESS = AMANDA

If home is where the heart is,  
Then where can I call my homeland?  
A planet I have never seen;  
A land I've never known;  
A race I've never walked among;  
A culture only learned of.  
It seems that even by your side  
I'll always walk alone.

But how can I refuse you, ever,  
When I've looked into those dark eyes  
And seen the loneliness within  
Those walls so fiercely closed?  
I *must* come with you to Vulcan,  
For I cannot live without you,  
And though I am so afraid deep down,  
I'll never let you know.

Sheryl Peterson



# THE ANASAZI

by

Sandy Catchick

The Enterprise was in spacedock, invisible from San Francisco Bay, but at rest above her home world, Earth.

On board, her officers were the last of the crew to disembark for well earned shore leave, and there was a subdued but happy hubbub as they concentrated on finalising leave arrangements.

Twenty-four hours previously Dr. McCoy had burst triumphantly onto the bridge to tell all and sundry that he was going on vacation with the Captain. It was a wilderness trip which the Captain had been planning for years, and for which he had finally received the necessary visit passes after submitting his twelfth application.

Only Uhura had pulled herself away from McCoy's excited soliloquy long enough to glance at the Vulcan. It was Mr. Spock who customarily went on vacation with the Captain if it was a camping trip. She could see no sign of disappointment in the blue-clad figure concentrating as usual on his hooded viewer. But it was hard to spot any kind of emotion even in the Vulcan's face, when he worked so hard to hide his feelings, and felt so ashamed if he let them surface and was caught out. Even then he had a logical explanation for everything.

Spock was even now concentrating on his viewer, and Uhura was sure he felt left out, particularly here on Earth where most of the crew had friends and family. Spock's mother Amanda was Human, but she had chosen the Vulcan way, and it was unlikely Spock would wish to visit her relatives. He rarely visited his parents when on Vulcan, even though they had now come to terms with his chosen career in Starfleet, his father having favoured an appointment with the Vulcan Science Academy.

Her concern gave her the courage to ask him tentatively, "Mr. Spock, I was wondering if you would like to accompany me to the West Coast Festival for your vacation. I am giving an exhibition."

Spock turned to face her, both eyebrows rising in what for him was an expression of amazement.

"Lieutenant Uhura," he said, "much as I appreciate the kind intent of your offer, it hardly seems becoming for a Starfleet officer to give an exhibition, and I would not wish to encourage or endorse such a display."

Uhura did not possess Spock's near-total emotional control, and she could not stop herself from laughing out loud.

"Mr. Spock," she slipped out between laughing and gasping for breath, "it is a *music* festival, and my exhibition is a musical recital. I will be singing an accompaniment to a variety of unusual and rare musical instruments."

Spock's eyebrows returned to normal, still at a rising angle compared to Human brows, but not nearly as noticeable to a Human at

first sight as his pointed Vulcan ears. His faith in the Enterprise's Communications Officer having been restored, he acknowledged but declined her invitation by replying,

"I see, Lieutenant. Most commendable. I would be interested to hear a tape of your 'exhibition', should you make one, but I must decline your offer." His emphasis on the word 'exhibition' made it quite clear to her that it was her word he was using, and he would have nothing to do with such a notion. He went on to add, "There is some most interesting research I must pursue."

This deepened the Captain's smile of amusement as he listened in, firstly at his First Officer's stance against an 'exhibition', and secondly at the thought of a wilderness trip being referred to as 'research'. But the Captain's smile turned to a frown as Spock ended, "I shall be staying on board the Enterprise."

"Spock," Kirk broke in, "you are not staying on board. Not this time. I've gone to a lot of trouble to get the visit passes for Mesa Verde, and I'll not authorise your remaining on board."

Spock's eyebrows climbed again as he considered the situation. "Captain," he said quietly, "Dr. McCoy is already packed and ready to accompany you. It would not be appropriate for me to step in at this time."

Captain Kirk realised at that moment that he had made a big mistake, and he suddenly understood the reason behind Uhura's invitation to the Vulcan. In his mind's eye he could also picture Spock's concern for Dr. McCoy, and he felt guilty that he had allowed this misunderstanding to arise.

"Spock," he began again, "I do want Dr. McCoy to accompany me. I want you both to accompany me. Dammit, I've waited a long time for this trip, and it wouldn't be the same if I couldn't share it with the two of you. Why do you think I've got *three* passes? Besides which, I do want you to do some research - but down there. I want you to research the Anasazi for me."

It was Kirk's intention to tantalise the Vulcan with the research bit, but he should have guessed that he would not catch Spock out so easily. After all, a Vulcan who knew about quadro-triticales would be just as likely to know about the Anasazi. Spock gave the matter a little further consideration, and then responded.

"Captain, I know this trip is important to you, and I should consider it an honour to accompany the doctor and yourself. This period of Earth's history has been of particular interest to me since our meeting with the Melkot. Despite the study by historians and archaeologists alike since the Wetherills' discovery, Old Earth Date 1888, the disappearance of the Anasazi is still a mystery today. I shall, indeed, appreciate a chance to see the remains of their civilisation for myself."

Kirk covered his surprise at the depth of the Vulcan's knowledge well, but was relieved when McCoy, who had come onto the bridge unnoticed, said,

"Well, you may all know what you're talking about, but I sure don't. Who or what are the Anasazi, and why isn't Spock ready to beam down yet? We've got to catch the shuttle at Cherry Creek, you know. There's no beaming around wilderness areas, and that shuttle's

not going to wait for us just because we come from the Enterprise."

Spock responded by finishing his work and closing down his station. "Indeed, Captain," he said calmly. "I will make the necessary preparations and join you shortly. And," he added, "for your information, Doctor, the Anasazi are an ancient Earth culture, colloquially called 'Indians', 'Pueblo Indians', or even 'The Old Ones' by your ancestors, I believe. Their discovery caused some re-thinking in your history books, as I recall, as their culture was quite advanced around Old Earth Date 1200 to 1300 - before the reported 'discovery' of America."

Luckily for McCoy, Spock didn't wait long enough to hear the doctor's response, "You're kidding!" Otherwise he would only have got the usual reply that Vulcans never joke.

Less than an hour later Kirk, Spock and McCoy materialised in Cherry Creek. All three were dressed casually in jeans, boots and open-necked shirts, and only Spock's elegant ears, the lack of hats and the camping packs they each carried distinguished them from the Old Earth 'Westerner' whose trails the trio would be following.

As they moved to join the queue for the local shuttle to Animas City, Kirk suddenly stopped in his tracks and his face turned pale. Spock, following the direction of his gaze, saw the large illuminated sign reading 'Denver', and in sudden comprehension moved close behind his Captain and spoke one word. "Jim."

Kirk, who as Spock had surmised, had misread the sign, had been reminded of their all too recent visit to Deneva, where Kirk's brother Sam had been killed by alien creatures and Spock himself had been attacked. The Vulcan, without physical contact, broke into Kirk's reverie with his own style of reassurance, and Kirk was moved to respond with a small, shaky, but nevertheless genuine smile.

Shaking his head almost imperceptibly at the doctor's querying glance, Spock proceeded to give them both a little history lesson, thereby - as intended - sidetracking Kirk completely.

"Unfortunately, as is common in Human nomenclature, city names are not often chosen logically. Cherry Creek was, indeed, the original name for the settlement here when it was just a small collection of buildings. As it grew and became established as a small town, the name was changed to Denver, a name it kept right through to the commencement of star dates. However - and here the logic escapes me - it was then decided that it would be more appropriate for the city to be renamed Cherry Creek in honour of its origins. I find it quite impossible to look at these buildings, the traffic, and the large population, and to think of something as simplistic as Cherry Creek. No doubt there was once a cherry tree growing on the banks of a creek somewhere in this vicinity, but the name is no longer appropriate or logical."

Both Kirk and McCoy were grinning by this time, but Spock had not finished.

"Even our destination, Animas City, has suffered a similar fate, Captain. That, too, was the original settlement in the area, but when the railway was built it fell short of Animas City, and a new town sprang up next to the railroad overnight. Animas City was abandoned in favour of the railway settlement called Durango. But

Durango too has been renamed Animas City, although the settlement is some two miles below the original Animas City. However, this had slightly more logic to it than the renaming of Cherry Creek, as the mountains surrounding it are the Animas mountains."

Luckily their continued history lesson was forestalled by the arrival of the shuttle, and the three of them boarded and took their seats for the spectacular trip over the Rockies. Although it was mid-summer, and it had been an exceptionally hot and dry year, the mountain peaks were covered with snow, and even Spock was moved to describe the view as 'aesthetically pleasing'.

Animas City was the start of their real adventure, and the three of them booked into a local hotel there overnight. In the morning they handed in their communicators, and to McCoy's disgust they were also forced to hand in his medical kit and scanner. The hotel clerk, totally unrepentant, just grinned and pointed to the board highlighting the rules of entry into a wilderness area. McCoy muttered under his breath that medical equipment should never be confiscated, but he did not make a scene about it.

The local airbus then took them on to Mancos, at the edge of the Mesa Verde wilderness area, which was as far as anything remotely mechanical was allowed to go. It was here that Spock stopped in his tracks, causing the doctor to walk into the back of him. The doctor followed his gaze to where three horses were being saddled up for the three Starfleet visitors.

Kirk grinned wickedly at the Vulcan and said, "Don't tell me you're afraid of horses, Spock, or is it the riding that scares you?" As he said it he realised that he had wanted to get his own back ever since the Vulcan had criticised his car driving ability, although confessing to admiring his ability as a Starship Captain.

Spock was not amused, and said solemnly, "I regret that I will be unable to ride with you, Captain."

Kirk tried to cajole him into it, wondering if he really was afraid, but it was McCoy who suddenly understood the reason for the Vulcan's reluctance.

He said, "Spock's right, you know, Jim. You can't ride a horse without being in close contact with it, and Spock can't keep his barriers up all the time."

Kirk had never given the idea of riding a second thought, and suddenly became worried for his First Officer. "I am sorry, Spock," he said. "I guess I just wasn't thinking."

Vulcan telepathy worked through contact with another being, and Spock had linked minds with beings as diverse as the rock-like Horta, and the too ugly/too beautiful Medusan, as well as his own Captain, through physical contact. He could keep his mental barriers up for a short time when in contact with another being, but the other's thoughts - and particularly emotions - tended to invade his own mind if he let the barriers drop. Kirk had not thought that through.

Spock, as though announcing the time of the next shuttle service, said, "I can, of course, walk, Captain."

Kirk was not sure if he was joking, but that was not likely. He responded, "But we'll be covering over fifty miles on this trip, Spock."

McCoy, however, came in on the Vulcan's side. "They invented Shanks's Pony long before they invented the horse, you know, Jim, and Spock is much better adapted to a long walk than either of us would be."

This caused the Vulcan to raise an eyebrow in question. "I am not familiar with the reference to Shanks's Pony, Captain, but the doctor is quite correct in his analysis of Vulcan stamina. I shall be better able to study the terrain, and the flora and fauna, on foot."

The doctor's rejoinder, "Smart-ass, Shanks's Pony means on foot," was not lost on the Vulcan's keen hearing, although he chose to ignore it.

As Kirk could see no other solution himself, he had to be satisfied when he and McCoy rode out of Manco's mounted on two fit, mountain-bred horses accompanied by the Vulcan on foot. Kirk spent the first hour worrying about Spock's ability to keep up with them, until he realised that the Vulcan was holding down his pace to match the slow pace of the horses. There was relief all round when the Captain realised this and pushed on at a steady jog-trot, alternating with a fast walk where the terrain was not so suitable.

When they made camp that night all three of them were beginning to feel relaxed in the beautiful countryside. Spock put up a shelter and built up a fire in no time, as though he spent all his life in the wilderness. But then, Kirk thought fondly, the Vulcan seemed to adapt to all circumstances with equal ease - except of course emotional circumstances.

McCoy's Georgia accent came to the fore as he recounted the trails they had covered that day and told tall stories, and Kirk and Spock broke in occasionally with reference to a plant or animal they had seen, or a story of their own. The fire had almost burned out when they went to bed, and Spock stopped to build it up for the night before retiring to his own blankets. Although the daytime temperature reached into the 80s, the cold came quickly once darkness fell, and the Vulcan was born to a desert planet, although he would not admit to feeling cold - a mentally controlled input to his mind, according to his Vulcan upbringing and training.

There was frost on the ground when Spock rose the next morning, although this had melted by the time he had their breakfast going and long before the doctor or the Captain raised their heads.

Spock had fried bacon for the two of them, although he would not eat meat himself, and contented himself with some vegetables he had brought in his pack. At odds with his reluctance to ride, he seemed quite at ease with the horses, and they went quietly with him when he led them to the stream for water.

Their second day's journey led them to the head of the Mesa Verde canyon, and they camped within sight of the cliff dwellings. Kirk read aright the Vulcan's keen curiosity as he stood looking out over the canyon, picking out with his keen gaze the habitations that could be spotted from his vantage point, until darkness fell and reduced the visibility to zero. It was the cold that finally brought the Vulcan back into camp to join his two companions by the fire for another night of quiet conversation.



They reached the dwellings by mid-morning, and all three spent the rest of the day in companionable silence, each approaching the ancient Anasazi culture from his own viewpoint. Spock was intrigued by the way the dwellings had been built into the cliff face itself, and the fact that they reached three storeys in height, although the Anasazi had not had the benefit of mortar. The word 'fascinating' was heard by the other two at frequent intervals as he prodded this or that piece of stone and jumped down into the kivas, a kind of underground chamber the Indians had used for religious ceremonies, to examine them more closely.

McCoy was equally fascinated by the way the Indians had lived, the sweetcorn they had grown, and the indications of their family and social relationships. Although he could be heard muttering about over-frequent use of the word 'fascinating', he was caught out saying it himself, and did at least have the grace to blush when he met the Vulcan's slightly amused eyes.

Kirk was the only non-specialist. He had no particular field of expertise to bring to bear. He was neither the scientist that Spock was, nor the medical expert that McCoy was, although the doctor tried hard to keep up his anti-technology, old country doctor stance. But for Kirk this visit was the culmination of years of longing to see the 'Ancient Ones' - the people who had lived in his homeland, America, centuries before he was born. People who had eked out a living from the harsh canyon area, who had learned to hunt, to use pots and basketware and to plant corn, yet had disappeared without a trace, leaving not even bones behind them. Some said it had been the long drawn out drought in the 13th century that had forced them to leave their homes to migrate to better climes. Others said that they had been defeated by a stronger, better armed enemy, and had been forced to flee for their lives without time to take treasured possessions with them. But no-one knew the whole story, and not even the later Indian tribes knew of these cliff dwellers. Yet these dwellings stood as a monument to a well developed early culture, a people that had built three-storey houses like the ones he could see here in the Cliff Palace, the largest of the settlements, when Europe had been in the throes of the Dark Ages and Columbus had yet to sail the ocean blue. Kirk felt a special affinity for them, and for these canyons. Here he could be at peace.

They spent the next week in Mesa Verde visiting a number of the settlements and comparing one to another. Balcony House held Spock's attention as it offered such a good vantage point to watch the lower valleys, and because he said it could be best defended of all the settlements. He was the first to spot an eagle circling above them from the protection of the Balcony House overhang. Kirk's favourite was the Cliff Palace - which was breathtaking in its sheer size - and McCoy liked the Spruce Tree House because of its name, a response which got yet another raised eyebrow from the Vulcan.

It was with reluctance that Kirk and McCoy saddled their respective horses on their final morning. All three had found peace and companionship in their time there together.

McCoy was mounted on the big but gentle buckskin and Kirk on the feisty Canelo gelding. The horses were ready for travel after the forced stop at Mesa Verde itself, and Spock found himself running to keep up with them for much of the afternoon. He enjoyed the exercise, and was not at all tired by the experience, in spite of the daytime temperature well into the 80s. Kirk had his hands full

controlling the Canelo, which he had named Vulcan for its red colour and, as he put it, for the fire in its heart. Spock had taken this as a compliment, and his eyes lit up, although he didn't quite smile.

They camped that night at the head of the Mancos canyon. They talked quietly into the evening. McCoy finally drew the evening to a close, having seen the Vulcan's surreptitious move closer to the fire.

"Let's hit the sack," he said, "before the night really gets cold."

Spock did not like to think that this move was for his benefit, and came back with the immediate rejoinder, "I was not aware that we had brought any sacks with us in our limited camping provisions, and see no reason why you would wish to hit one if we had."

McCoy didn't rise to the bait. He was too tired, and was looking forward to a good night's rest. He just said, "That was a colloquialism for 'let's go to bed', Spock, and I for one am ready to sleep. What a country!" he added. "Freezing cold by night and boiling hot by day. It sure beats me. But it's beautiful."

Spock considered taking up the issue on the basis of the doctor's gaping holes in logic, but the Captain closed the matter for him by saying,

"See you in the morning, people. I'm only sorry that we've only got one more night left out here. I for one could spend a few more weeks here. It really is beautiful."

Spock found himself joining McCoy in nodding agreement, and was glad he had let the gaping holes in logic rest.

The next morning dawned bright and clear, and the sun was bright overhead by the time breakfast was over.

"It's going to be a scorcher today," commented McCoy.

"Indeed," replied Spock. "It would appear to be close to Vulcan norm - quite refreshing."

McCoy, well rested by now, was happy to take up this argument by responding, "I wouldn't mind a little more of your Vulcan weather, Spock, it's your Vulcan logic I can do without."

Kirk was again left to prevent the brewing argument by leading the horses forward. "Do you want to swap horses for today, Bones?" he asked with a glint in his eye. "It seemed to me from what I overheard of your conversation with Spock that you were keen to sample more Vulcan weather. This horse could teach you a thing or two - dust storms, volcanic eruptions, thunder, lightning, you name it!"

Spock insisted that the Captain's description was nothing like Vulcan weather, and McCoy declined the swap on the basis that the Captain needed the exercise more than he did. The three set off pretty equal on points - if any of them were counting.

It was at mid-day that disaster struck. They had not been expecting trouble, and were in fact leisurely looking for a good

place to stop when there was a sudden rattle from the rocks ahead of them. Kirk's horse left the ground, rearing wildly, and totally unprepared, Kirk found himself in difficulty. He might have stayed on board, only the horse was so panicked that it overbalanced and fell over backwards. Kirk slid off over its rump and the horse landed on top of him. Involuntarily Kirk yelled as the horse, desperately trying to regain its feet, stepped onto his leg. They all heard the sharp breaking of bone as those iron-shod hooves scrabbled for footing, and the horse finally made it to its feet using Kirk's leg as a springboard for its gymnastics. Kirk promptly lost consciousness.

McCoy was having problems controlling his own horse, and watched in what to him seemed like a slow-motion replay as Spock rushed to the Captain's aid. He was in time to see the rattlesnake that had originally spooked the horses prepare to strike the totally helpless Kirk. With what only McCoy would dare to call 'an emotional act', Spock jumped between the snake and Kirk with complete lack of thought for his own safety, just in time to receive the full force of the snake's fangs on his arm. McCoy shouted to Spock to kill the snake, but Spock responded that the creature was only acting according to its own nature, and he did not wish it any ill. He did, however, pick the animal up and remove it from the vicinity of the Captain, careful this time to keep away from its fangs.

McCoy said in total disbelief, "Spock, do you realise that that was a rattler? Its poison can kill, and it will do if we don't get to an antidote within the next twenty-four hours."

Spock replied calmly, as though he was a totally disinterested party, "It is indeed rare to find a rattlesnake in this area and at this altitude. No doubt the exceptional weather has caused it to move further north, although it is beyond me how it survives the cold nights."

"Spock!" shouted McCoy, exasperated. "What are we going to do?"

Spock, calm as ever, replied, "We, Doctor, are going to proceed logically in the only manner open to us. You will have to ride the red horse, and I will lift the Captain onto yours. We will then proceed to find a shelter and water where we can make camp until help arrives."

"Even if we could do that," replied McCoy, "and I have my doubts, who do you think is going to go for help? By that time you'll be totally incapable of going anywhere, and I'll have to keep an eye on both of you."

Spock replied. "There is only one possibility, Doctor, and I am glad that you raised the subject, as it is not one I could raise myself." He continued, "I shall have to mind-meld with one of the horses and send it back for help."

"Can you do that?" asked McCoy worriedly.

"Affirmative," responded Spock. "It is a relatively simple message. However, we must be at the point where we wish the horse to return before I proceed with the meld. The only difficulty I can envisage is if I am incapable of making the meld by that time. Does your twenty-four hours apply to Vulcans, Doctor, or is that a Human reaction to the poison?"

"I don't know what effect it will have on a Vulcan," replied

McCoy despondently.

Spock merely said, "Then we should not waste any more time, Doctor. We must get to a spot with water and shelter before I send the horse for help."

Without waiting to see what the doctor would do Spock proceeded to catch the red horse and bring it back. McCoy was forced to bellow at him to get his attention.

"Spock," he said, anger and concern making his voice sound harsh, "let me at least try and get some of the poison out of your arm first. I've never heard of anything so stupid as trying to run around pumping poison through your veins."

"Do you have an alternative method of taking the Captain to a place of safety?" asked Spock.

When McCoy shook his head, looking even more dejected, the Vulcan felt the depth of concern for both the Captain and himself, and acceded to McCoy examining his arm, if reluctantly. McCoy made a cut over the puncture wound and sucked out as much poison as possible before the two of them turned to the task of getting Kirk on board the buckskin.

McCoy was worried about Spock, and asked him if he would prefer to ride, or if he wanted a rest.

Spock responded, "Doctor, I know my own mind as well as any man. I believe I can avoid the effects of the poison until such time as it reaches my brain, and by that time we will have got to a place where I can leave the Captain safely. There is no other means of progressing, and riding your horse would only lower my mental barriers to the poison more quickly."

The doctor in McCoy led him to ask curiously, "Do you mean you are controlling the poison from your brain, Spock?"

"Not exactly, Doctor," he replied. "I cannot control the pace at which the poison is affecting my bloodstream, but I can control its physical effects while my mental barriers guard against it entering my mind. However, once I lose that battle the poison will take effect very quickly."

McCoy decided it was best to leave the Vulcan to concentrate on maintaining his mental barriers, and he fell silent.

The two trudged on until, some two hours later, they finally found a suitable spot and made camp close to a small stream. Spock insisted on lifting the still unconscious Kirk from his horse and making him comfortable before he would even consider McCoy's pleas to look after himself and rest.

"Before I rest, Doctor," he added, "I must make the meld."

They chose the red horse as the faster of the two. Spock put out his hands and held the horse's head gently between his fingertips. "My mind to your mind..." he began.

When he had finished he carefully tied the horse's reins so that it would not trip up en route, and McCoy put their hastily scrawled plea for help into the saddlebag before they released the animal. The note asked their rescuers to follow the horse back to their

location, and to bring medical assistance for a Vulcan suffering from rattlesnake poisoning, and a Human suffering from a broken leg.

"Are you sure the horse will lead them back here, Spock?" asked the doctor.

"I am sure," replied Spock.

The doctor, knowing how well Spock knew his own mind, felt a first flood of relief.

The relief was short-lived. The mind-meld had reduced the Vulcan's resistance to the poison. Although Spock had said the poison would react quickly once it reached his brain, McCoy was horrified when within two minutes of the meld Spock suddenly stiffened, holding himself still for an interminable moment before dropping to the ground unconscious. By the time McCoy ran over to him the Vulcan's face was covered in a thin film of sweat.

There was nothing the doctor could do. Not without his medikit. He didn't even have a scanner to verify how far the poison had got. He cursed wilderness areas in general and Mesa Verde in particular, relieving his own feelings though doing nothing for either of his patients. 'Patients' was a joke, he thought to himself. What was the point of being a doctor if you could do nothing for your two best friends?

McCoy had always sworn that people were more important than gadgets, and all this new-fangled technology was not essential. As he let that thought grab a hold on him he turned his mind from despair to the practical things he could do. He could not stop the poison rushing through Spock's body, but he could do something for the fever. It would be up to him to keep the Vulcan alive until help arrived.

Similarly, although he could not set Kirk's leg while they remained here, he could make the Captain more comfortable, and at least put splints on to keep the limb immobile.

McCoy concentrated on doing what he could, and although he didn't realise it keeping busy was the best therapy for him, too. By nightfall he had Spock and Kirk both wrapped in blankets. Kirk's leg was held tight between two strong splints of wood - not works of art, but serviceable. He had also gathered a massive amount of wood for a fire, and settled himself now to boil some water and watch his two patients.

It was Spock who concerned him most. The Vulcan was flushed with fever in the day's heat, but that was infinitely preferable to his succumbing to the fever in the cold of the night. He was therefore taken off guard when Kirk, regaining consciousness, suddenly spoke.

"Bones, what's going on? What's wrong with Spock?"

McCoy turned swiftly to face the Captain. He knew it was best to give him the facts. "I'm sorry, Jim," he began. "Spock was bitten by a rattlesnake, the one that spooked your horse. He's fighting the poison, but I just don't know what to do for him, and I don't know what signs to look for in a Vulcan. I've never heard of a Vulcan being poisoned by a rattler before. There's just no information to go on. He could last a day, a week, or an hour - I just don't know."

Kirk was appalled. He'd have been more appalled if McCoy had told him that Spock had taken the poison to save the Captain, but there was no way the doctor would have told him. The Vulcan would never forgive him if he did, but more to the point, he would never forgive himself.

"What can we do for him?" asked Kirk, falling back into his Captain mode.

"All we can do is keep the fever down as much as possible, and keep him warm. It is the cold that worries me. His Vulcan metabolism is not built for cold when he's fit, but with the fever burning in him it's going to be touch and go whether he makes it through the night."

"And then?" asked Kirk.

McCoy realised that he didn't know Spock had sent his horse back for help. He proceeded to fill the Captain in.

By midnight Spock's teeth were chattering despite the fact that the sweat was still pouring off him. McCoy had built up the fire as much as possible, and Spock had all their blankets. It was not enough.

McCoy finally said, "The only thing we can do is lie down next to him and keep him warm with our own body heat, act as Human hot water bottles."

"But we're not as hot as he is. His temperature is normally well over a hundred," responded Kirk. "And what about his telepathic abilities if we are touching him?"

"We're a lot warmer than the temperature out here," said McCoy. "I suspect he'd rather feel our concern for him through our contact with him than die because of the lack of it," he added.

They spent a very uncomfortable night. McCoy and Kirk lay on either side of Spock, and Kirk made no sound even when the Vulcan touched his broken leg, which was bumped at irregular intervals as the Vulcan tossed and turned, fighting the fever, fighting the poison and fighting the cold.

That was how the rescuers found them when they followed the red horse into the rocks of their shelter the following morning, three men lying tightly packed together, all three the worse for wear, but all alive.

"We did not expect to find you all alive," said Duncan, their leader. "I'm amazed you kept the Vulcan alive through the night. The poison works on them to lower their resistance to cold, you know. Eventually they overcome the effects of the poison in their bloodstream through their own build-up of antibodies, but according to the records, most Vulcans exposed to a bite in the wild die of cold before they can recover."

The rescuers proceeded to provide the three men with survival blankets and provided good hot food for the Humans. Duncan took a moment to catch McCoy alone on one side.

"I understand that you are Chief Surgeon on the USS Enterprise?"



he began.

McCoy nodded.

Duncan hesitated, but seeing only curiosity in the clear blue eyes, he continued, "I brought your medical kit with me. This incident has made me realise how dangerous our primitive area policy can be when applied so stringently. We will not confiscate medical equipment in future, although we must protect the area from modern technology in general. Without your quick thinking the confiscation could have proved fatal this time."

McCoy agreed, remembering his earlier reluctance to hand over his medical kit and scanner to the hotel clerk in Animas City - was it only a week or so ago?

Duncan added, "I am Administrator of the Mesa Verde area, but I will personally take up the matter with the other wilderness areas too, Doctor. I am sure they will see the logic in revising our policy."

McCoy smiled, looking fondly back at the Vulcan. He was glad that he would be hearing someone else's brand of logic again.

The rescuers had arranged transport back to civilisation, where McCoy took over care of his two patients, relieved for once to be back with all his new technology. He didn't even complain when the transporter beamed the three aboard the Enterprise, where he immediately transferred his charges to the empty sickbay.

Once on board Spock recovered sufficiently to put himself into a healing trance. McCoy set the Captain's leg in a light-weight cast and then settled back to watch his two charges. Now that he had them both under surveillance and could see that their vital signs were stable, he was not worried.

Much as they were loath to admit it, they actually enjoyed that week almost as much as the week at Mesa Verde, as on the empty Enterprise they were able to relax and enjoy each other's company.

By the end of the week all three were back on duty, and the only sign of their adventures was the cast on Kirk's leg, which would come off in a few more days.

When the fully rested officers and crew of the Enterprise returned from their R&R - and a little hell-raising - they were surprised to see that their senior officers had preceded them on board.

"How was your holiday?" asked Uhura curiously, wondering how the wilderness trip had gone, and looking pointedly at the Captain's leg.

McCoy advised her that they had had a wonderful time exploring the cliff dwellings and learning all about the Anasazi. Kirk, looking sheepishly at his leg, said they had also learned a fair bit about wild horses and the local wildlife, too.

"And you, Mr. Spock?" asked Uhura. "What did you learn?"

Spock looked contemplatively at his Captain and the doctor, and replied blandly, "I learned a great deal about Human hot water

bottles, Miss Uhura."

The bridge crew looked at each other, and a few non-Vulcan eyebrows were raised, but seeing the wide grins on Kirk's and McCoy's faces, and the semi-smile that hovered over the Vulcan's features, none of them asked for details.

After a long minute the Captain broke the spell by turning to his bridge crew and smilingly saying, "Welcome back, everyone."

By the time he looked back to the Vulcan his First Officer had turned his attention back to his sensors.

*Back to duty - everything normal,* thought Kirk with a sigh of relief.



## TO A VERY HUMAN VULCAN

I wish that I could know you,  
have you close enough to touch you,  
feel you stand there at my side  
and see those lonely, dark brown eyes.  
I wish that you could know me,  
know that I can see inside you,  
and that one person does understand  
wherein your turmoil lies.  
I, too, was born divided,  
ever out of place and lonely,  
always torn by silent warfare  
as to what I was to do.  
I walked an alien in this land,  
resigned to my lonely battle.  
My heart cried out to the stars for peace,  
and suddenly there was you.  
You do not know I exist.  
You walk your own path in a far world.  
Our lives can never touch,  
for you are in another land.  
Would it comfort you to know  
you're not alone - there is another?  
Can I touch you with my thoughts  
though I can never touch your hand?

Sheryl Peterson



# HOME FROM THE STARS

by

Christine Maybank

Captain Kirk gazed absently at the star pattern on the viewscreen, his thoughts focused on a problem a thousand light years distant. Having received no news, he found it impossible to keep his feelings hidden as his anxiety grew. The crew sympathised with their Captain's predicament but there was nothing anyone could do to help alleviate his eternal waiting.

His First Officer was invaluable during the days of frustration, becoming responsible for the endless duties of command on which Kirk found it impossible to concentrate. He was deeply grateful for the support he received from the crew, especially his senior officers, but their co-operation in shouldering his responsibilities left him with nothing to do but think. His mind conjured up images of horrors which fed on his anxiety, causing an involuntary shudder to run down his spine, and he stood, to pace across the small confines of floor space surrounding the command chair.

He sensed several pairs of eyes focused upon him; looking up he noted the amused expressions of the bridge personnel.

"Sorry, ladies and gentlemen." Kirk mumbled the apology and sat again. Time slowly passed.

Shortly before the end of the duty period, the quiet routine was interrupted by an insistent bleeping from the communications console. Kirk swung the command chair around expectantly, and seconds later the communications officer turned to him with a knowing smile and declared,

"Congratulations, Captain, you are the proud father of a bouncing baby boy!"

Kirk remained silent for several seconds whilst the news penetrated his bemused mind; then with a delighted yell, he leaped out of the command chair.

"Lieutenant, I could kiss you!" He hesitated and proceeded to do so, much to her delight. Kirk was soon surrounded, receiving congratulatory pats on the back.

Several hours - and a great deal of alcoholic intake - later, Kirk lay on the bunk in his quarters, contemplating his life. He was elated following the day's events, but he also felt saddened, and regretted that he had been unable to attend the actual birth and that he would not be present for a great deal of his son's childhood. But that was the price he had to pay for having a successful, albeit demanding, career in Starfleet. He had thought everything through several times, but always reached the same conclusion; no matter how much he missed his home and family, Starfleet meant everything to him, and he could not imagine himself in a life of domesticated bliss, not even with his new son at his side.

With a sigh of resignation, he rolled onto his side and closed

his eyes. His last conscious thought was of how long it would be before he saw the latest member of the Kirk family.

Three months later, Kirk and his crew received unexpected shore leave when his ship was ordered to the space-dock orbiting Earth for an extensive refit. Within hours of relinquishing command to the dock-master, Kirk was en route to Iowa and the farm where he had been born; a farm which had been in the Kirk family for generations, and which he hoped would continue to be so for generations to come.

Though farming was not in his blood, Kirk loved the land where he had grown up, and he looked appreciatively at the fields of colourful crops as the hired speeder took him closer to his destination. Finally he arrived home and impatiently entered the house. He stood in the entrance hall, silently taking in the familiar surroundings. Wondering where everyone was, he called out.

"Hey, is anyone home? Mum! Stella! I'm here!"

Immediately he was surrounded, receiving a hero's welcome. Then he was led upstairs to the nursery where he saw his son for the first time. Gingerly, he picked up the fragile bundle. Instinct told the infant that the man was friendly, and James Tiberius Kirk nestled contentedly in his father's arms; a tiny fist grasping the command gold shirt in fascination.

Captain George Samuel Kirk held his son closely for several minutes, getting acquainted. Words could not express how he felt at that moment and he hugged his wife and child in a tight embrace. The sound of pounding feet on the landing made Kirk turn and he quickly put James back into the safe haven of the cot before another body threw itself at him.

"Daddy! You're home!"

George Kirk swung his older son into the air. "George! My God, how you've grown!" Kirk couldn't believe it - George Junior was so tall!

Back on the ground, George Samuel Kirk Junior looked up at his father and proudly boasted, "I'm four now, Daddy, and one of the tallest boys in my class."

Is that so?" Kirk replied, ruffling George's hair. "In that case, I will have to reserve you a place in Starfleet."

George Junior remained silent for several seconds, considering the offer before replying in a serious manner. "No thank you, Daddy. I want to stay at home with Mummy and Little Jimmy. Besides, I wouldn't be able to play with my friends if I was in Starfleet."

Kirk laughed. "What do you think of your brother?" he asked.

George peered through the bars of the cot and gazed at James. "He's all right, I suppose, but he's not much fun. He just eats and sleeps all day. He can't even talk! He either makes silly gurgling sounds or he cries a lot. Did I cry when I was a baby?"

"You certainly did," his mother replied. "Don't worry, George. One day Jimmy will be able to run and play with you."

"Goody." George Junior looked at his brother again. "I'll look forward to that."

"Come on, George," Kirk said. "Let's go downstairs and see what presents await your inspection." He took hold of George's hand and with one last look at James he guided his older son downstairs.

Stella Kirk followed close behind, and she heard George say, "Are you home from the stars forever this time, Daddy?"

The question burned into Kirk's soul. He squeezed George's hand tightly and a shadow crossed his face when he replied.

"Not this time, George, not this time. One day I will be, I promise, but not yet." He glanced at Stella, and she noted that there were tears in his eyes.

When George Samuel Junior was sixteen and James was twelve, their father came home from the stars for the last time, but not in the way he had promised.

After the funeral, the family gathered back at the house and that was when James dropped the bombshell his mother had dreaded to hear.

"When I'm old enough, I want to join Starfleet and become a Captain like father was. I want to become the Captain of a Starship."

George spun round from the window he had been gazing through, and there was anger in his voice. "How can you say that, especially at a time like this! Hasn't Starfleet done enough to this family by taking father away from us? Though he was never here when I needed him anyway."

"George! That's a dreadful thing to say," his mother chided.

"Well, it's true. We only saw him when Starfleet considered it convenient! I certainly would never sign my life away to an organisation like that; I would rather work on some quiet planet where it's safe to raise a family and where I could be with them all the time."

"Well, I still want to join Starfleet," James replied indignantly. "I know it's dangerous, and it means I will be away from home, but I hope you understand, Mother - it's something I have to do."

Stella Kirk hugged her youngest son. "I don't like it, Jimmy; I've lost one member of this family to Starfleet, but I do understand, more than you believe. George takes after me, content to stay at home with the family, but you have that restless streak within you and you're so like your father - in more ways than one.

"But you've plenty of time before you need to make any final decisions, and I do ask you to think this over carefully, Jimmy. Starfleet is not the kind of life to lead if you hope to marry and raise a family some day; it's always hardest on the ones left behind." She looked at George as she spoke, and her heart went out to the lonely figure gazing out of the window once more.



James returned his mother's hug. "I have thought about it, Mum. I want the life that Starfleet offers more than anything, but I swear that as long as I am in the service I will never marry or have children."

James T. Kirk had never forgotten those words, and they came back to haunt him as he stood by the graveside of his deceased wife and unborn child.

Poor Miramanee!

But perhaps it was for the best that she had died... Which of two heart-rending decisions would he have made had she lived - Starfleet, or a life of domesticity with Miramanee's tribe?

His mother had been right; he was more like his father than his brother had ever been.

Sam...

He had received his wish for a quiet family life on Deneva; but it had not been the safe haven he had thought, and he had died tragically with his wife, leaving his only son an orphan.

Kirk was brought out of his reverie by a noise from behind. Turning, he saw Spock and McCoy silently waiting for him. He smiled and felt a warm glow flow through him, easing the sadness in his heart. He strode over to his friends, and together they beamed back to the Enterprise.

Kirk was happy to be going home; home to the stars.



## EXILE

If I go among the stars,  
 What shall I find there?  
 Can I really hope to find  
 What my heart needs?  
 Can there be for me  
 A place of true belonging?  
 Hope is a fragile flower  
 Without seed.  
 Should I rather live my life  
 Out here, in exile,  
 Than leave it for some place  
 I cannot know?  
 You are my own race,  
 Yet can I be more the stranger  
 In this even stranger world  
 Where I now go?



Sheryl Peterson

# BETTER TO HAVE LOVED...

by

Teresa Abbott

'Maybe.'

Such a little word to cause disquiet.

The duty shift being over, Spock handed over to his relief, and passing by the Captain's chair asked almost as an afterthought, "Will I see you for our usual game tonight, Captain?"

Kirk was busy signing a report, and answered without looking up. "I'm afraid I'll have to cancel tonight, Mr. Spock."

An ordinary conversation, one they had exchanged many times over the years. Why then the sudden tightening of... fear?... in his stomach?

The Vulcan hesitated, reluctant to pursue the matter further here in public, but feeling compelled to ask, "Of course, Captain. Tomorrow night, maybe?"

Kirk's reply was impatient. "Maybe, Mr. Spock. I'm a busy man."

Too late, Spock realised that the other bridge personnel were also listening to their conversation, subliminally aware of some subtle change in the atmosphere between himself and the Captain. Nodding curtly in acknowledgement, Spock left the bridge, knowing that his outward mask was in place, but also very much aware of the fact that the others on the bridge knew this to be the case.

For some time now Spock had been aware of a gradual change in the way the Captain behaved towards him. The changes were so slight that he doubted whether they were apparent to anyone but himself. The incident today was not an isolated one, but the last of several where Kirk had displayed an impatience that he had long ago ceased to expect from his friend.

It was as if Kirk had become unwilling to spend their usual time together. There had been several chess games recently cancelled, and the ones they had played had not been the relaxed affairs they usually were. Spock had tried to gently query the situation, and had met with an air of almost intolerance.

On previous occasions when Kirk had acted out of character Spock had always been able to attribute it to some external source. This time it would seem that he, Spock himself, was the cause. It was almost as if - he thought the words unwillingly - Jim was growing tired of their friendship?

He wondered what McCoy would say of the situation, and guessed - or maybe hoped - that the doctor would pour scorn on his apprehensions. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that he needed some external advice, and resolved to speak to the doctor at the earliest

opportunity.

His relief on seeing the Captain in the canteen next morning with a young girl Spock had not previously encountered was tangible. They did not seem to be talking much, but perhaps the attraction was not a mental one?

Spock immediately attributed their missed evenings to the new 'distraction', and felt extremely relieved, for although he didn't fully understand Human attachments he knew that Kirk's relationships seldom distracted him from friends or work for long.

He barely noticed that McCoy had come and sat at his table.

"I see you've noticed Jim's new companion." The doctor, as usual, came straight to the point.

"Obviously that is the reason that he has been avoiding us."

In his relief Spock had spoken without thinking, and didn't fail to notice the doctor's slight hesitation in reply, and the lowering of his eyes.

"Yes, that's what it must be." McCoy tried to make it sound jovial and failed.

And it came to Spock that what the small voice inside of him had been treacherously whispering was true: it was only Spock himself who was being avoided, and not McCoy as well.

Following this conversation, McCoy realised that the situation had developed to a point where he could no longer, either personally or professionally, afford to ignore it.

The Enterprise had picked up Yeoman Adams at Starbase 12 two weeks ago. She was a temporary replacement for Janice Rand, who had had the misfortune to fall and break her leg in a freak accident at the Starbase while the ship's engines were undergoing a routine overhaul. As the Enterprise was scheduled for a routine mapping session for the next two months, it was felt best that she remain at the Starbase, to be picked up again on their return journey.

The new yeoman was small, slightly built, altogether a very plain type of girl. McCoy himself would have thought that Yeoman Rand would have been much more to Kirk's taste. But he also knew the Captain had a rule never to get involved with members of the crew, so perhaps the temporary nature of her appointment made him feel more at ease with her.

When McCoy first realised that the Captain was to be seen with her most hours off duty, he was amused and somewhat pleased, feeling the tonic of a light-hearted relationship might relax his friend and alleviate the boredom he knew Kirk always felt on these routine mapping missions. He'd never mentioned it to Spock, as he had assumed that the Vulcan was well aware of the situation. It was only very gradually that he realised that for some reason Spock was being excluded from the relationship, rather than being the confidant that he had been in Kirk's previous attachments. However much he thought about it, he couldn't think of a reason why.

Kirk was never openly hostile to Spock; just indifferent, which was worse. The warmth that had existed between the pair of them seemed to have gone, and McCoy was puzzled and worried as to why this should be so. If the Captain had shown signs of stress or irritability; if he had seemed ill; if for any reason there had been signs of unfairness or bad judgement on the bridge; then McCoy could have asked for a medical. But he couldn't justify to Starfleet that he had demanded a full medical on a Starship Captain just because the Captain preferred the company of a young girl to that of his First Officer.

It was only today that he realised how badly this must be affecting Spock.

He was perhaps the only person on board, apart from the two of them, who knew how slowly and how carefully Spock had placed his trust in Kirk. He was one of the few who knew how totally the Vulcan had opened himself up to the Human after the years of being rejected both by his own and his mother's people, and he shuddered to think of how Spock would withdraw into himself if for any reason he now felt that trust to be misplaced. Although he teased the Vulcan about his lack of feelings he knew only too well how those non-existent feelings could be devastated.

Even as he thought through all these things part of him felt that they must all be in his imagination. Just two weeks ago he would have sworn that the relationship between the two men was indestructible. And he had to admit to himself that he also depended heavily on inclusion in that relationship, and that although he had known Kirk longer he would now find it impossible to divide his loyalty between the two of them.

As a result of his thinking things through McCoy found himself that evening at Spock's door, not knowing what to say but knowing that he could no longer say nothing.

As soon as he saw the Vulcan's cold, controlled face he knew that Spock realised why he had come, and that words were unnecessary.

"I don't think he means to hurt you." The words were out before he could analyse the wisdom of saying them.

It was a measure of Spock's distress that although outwardly calm he did not bother with the pretence of failing to understand.

"It is the Captain's business who he wishes to spend his free time with." The Vulcan turned away from McCoy to indicate that he was unwilling to continue the conversation.

The doctor hesitated. "I'm still free for chess." He tried to inject a note of humour into his voice, and failed; but he had had to make it clear that his own feelings towards the Vulcan were unchanged.

But Spock didn't answer, and realising that he would get no further reaction, McCoy reluctantly left the cabin.

Spock, left alone, looked deep within himself and knew that he was not jealous of the girl, was not afraid that she would 'take away' his friend. He had shared many mind-melds with the Human, and both of them knew and understood that the pull to mate with one's own

species was a thing different and apart from their friendship, and did not detract from it.

No, it was not the girl he was afraid of, but the coldness and indifference in his friend's eyes.

The situation went from bad to worse. Slowly the atmosphere spread throughout the ship. McCoy was aware that most of the junior staff below decks were on Kirk's 'side', if 'sides' were taken, as not many people had the patience or caring to try to see behind the Vulcan's emotionless exterior. On the bridge, however, the atmosphere was uncertain and confused. In the absence of any open hostility the other officers did not know how to behave. Like McCoy, they had long regarded their two superior officers as an unbreakable team, and were at a loss as to how to deal with the situation.

It reached the point that even McCoy's meetings with Kirk became increasingly uncomfortable, not because of any hostility but because he seemed so normal. Once or twice he had tried to raise the subject of Spock, but Kirk had either seemed genuinely puzzled, or that damn girl would turn up and the pair of them would go off together like two besotted sixteen year olds.

But when Nurse Chapel drew to his attention that fact that Spock was spending nearly all of his off-duty time alone in his quarters, and had twice forgotten to report for his food supplements, McCoy braced himself to finally have it out with Kirk. Admitting to himself that he was being a coward, he asked the Captain to come and see him in his office in sickbay, feeling that anything he had to say had more authority on his 'home ground'.

Again the strange sensation that it was all a bad dream as Kirk came smiling into the office and sat down.

"What is it, Bones? You don't often ask to see me like this."

McCoy took a deep breath and plunged in. "It's about Spock."

The words hung like a challenge between them.

"What about Spock? Is he unwell or something? Come to think of it, he hasn't been around much lately." The Captain frowned slightly, as if realising the fact for the first time.

McCoy was unbelieving. He leaned forward. "Jim, I've never interfered in your personal relationships unless they affect the running of the ship. In my opinion, since you've started seeing so much of Yeoman Adams you've been..." he hesitated, "...unusually cold and indifferent to Spock, to the point that the crew members have noticed the situation, and it's beginning to concern them."

Even as he said the words he hoped for a quick denial or apology - anything that would indicate that this was all untrue. But for the first time there was a flash of hostility in Kirk's eyes.

"You mean you've called me down here to complain that I prefer the girl's company to Spock's? Has he been moaning to you about it? Have I mistreated him in any way since I've been seeing her?"

McCoy was stunned. In the face of such total denial he didn't know whether to be angry or disbelieving.

"Jim..." he faltered, not knowing how to continue. "Jim, you and Spock..."

"Me and Spock what?" Kirk interrupted. "We've worked well in the past because we've been thrown together in our jobs, and I'll not deny we had a kind of friendship; but friendships change, and perhaps I'm outgrowing this one."

McCoy was angry now. "Are you trying to deny that the two of you have a special relationship that goes beyond what most people have? Yours is one of the few real Human/Vulcan friendships there have ever been! The whole of Starfleet knows that. This ship couldn't run as it does without..."

"Without what?" Kirk was openly angry now. "I command this ship because I've worked hard and deserve it, not because of some mystical relationship with an unemotional Vulcan. And if this girl has made me realise that there's more to life than traipsing around the galaxy with an alien as a friend, then perhaps she's finally made me come to my senses!"

Enraged, he turned to go...

... and stopped as he noticed Spock standing in the doorway of McCoy's office.

With a mental groan McCoy realised that he had insisted that Spock see him personally for his food supplements, and that this was the time they were due. He shook inwardly as he noticed the Vulcan's icy stillness, and his heart cried out for his friend. How long had he stood there listening to Kirk denying everything that had ever existed between them?

Before either of them could stop him, Kirk had gone out of the door with a curt nod to Spock on the way, as if nothing had happened.

So the nightmare had finally become reality.

Spock knelt before the Vulcan flame to meditate, and tried to bring all the Vulcan mind rules to bear on his distress, but here in his cabin there was no-one to pretend to, and he could no longer still the shaking as he finally acknowledged the unthinkable.

He had learned to trust and share himself so slowly that the suddenness of the betrayal sliced through him like a knife. He had not said anything to McCoy, but had approached Kirk twice in the previous week to try and re-establish a trace of their old rapport; to try and sense what, if anything, he had done to damage the link between them. Each time the indifferent politeness had hurt more than a slap in the face.

The scene in the doctor's office had upset Spock more than he would ever admit. It came to him ironically that the one person in the universe he could previously have spoken to about it was the one person no longer interested.

For what seemed like hours he analysed the situation from every logical angle. He could find no reason for his friend's behaviour other than Human unpredictability. After all his years in Starfleet amongst Humans, after his immense care in choosing this friendship, had he after all made such a terrible mistake?

Suddenly, and in desperation, he knew that he had to know the truth of his friend's innermost feelings. It was forbidden under every aspect of Vulcan law to contact another's mind against his will or without his knowledge, but the Human half of him cried out that he *had* to know.

He trusted that the link between their minds would still be there; surely a few weeks of coldness could not erase the bonds forged through years of sharing? He had kept his shields tightly in place throughout the last few weeks, needing them to protect himself from the pity he felt in the minds of others. But now it was night. The Captain - Jim - would be asleep, and would not know of his contact. Carefully, knowing what he did was wrong, he closed his eyes and reached out in the darkness, querying,

\\Jim? T'hy'la?\\

... And was almost slammed physically back by the strength of the hatred and dislike that met him.

Spock's nerves screamed in agony, and he almost doubled over at the violence of the mental contact.

After a moment's hesitation, and no longer trying to pretend to himself that he was acting with his mind and not his heart, he did what he had only done once in his life before, after his rejection by the woman T'Pring. Looking deep inside his own mind he carefully and deliberately severed the telepathic link that had bound him for so many years to Kirk. He did not weep as he did so, but no-one would ever know the amount of Vulcan pride he had to use to ensure that he did not.

News of Spock's request for a transfer back to Vulcan spread throughout the ship like wildfire. It reached McCoy via the grapevine barely minutes after Spock had submitted the transfer form to the Captain. According to the person who told McCoy, Kirk had calmly accepted and signed the transfer, and was now on the bridge as usual.

McCoy felt as if his world was collapsing around him. Many times he had been terrified that he would lose his friends in battle, but this situation was like a nightmare. Whatever problems had beset the Enterprise, McCoy and the crew knew that the special relationship between the Captain and Spock gave them an edge that other Starships did not have. If one of them had been killed, McCoy knew that somehow he would have found the strength to stay on the Enterprise and help the other to carry on. This destroying of a relationship was something he had never even imagined.

If Spock left now, driven away by Jim's cruelty to him, McCoy knew he would also have to leave. He had been a friend to Jim for as long as he could remember, but even their friendship had a price, and Spock's unhappiness - no, Spock's destruction, because McCoy knew that the Vulcan would never inwardly recover from such a blow - would bring it to an end.

He couldn't bring himself to face Spock; he had said all he could to him already. Maybe one last plea to Jim?

Inwardly he baulked at the idea, as interviews with Kirk were painful reminders of how things had been, but he found himself



heading for the Captain's cabin as if drawn there. Receiving no answer, he used his medical override to enter, and finding the cabin empty, called the bridge.

An unknown voice answered him; it only struck McCoy now that it was late 'evening', and the night shift had taken over. In his anxiety he had lost all track of time.

"Does anyone know where the Captain is?" He tried to make his voice casual, unconcerned.

"Yes, sir. He beamed down with the planet survey party a short while ago."

McCoy was puzzled. "I didn't realise we were orbiting a planet."

"Yes, sir, a previously uncharted Class M planet. It was thought to be probably capable of supporting life, and the Captain and landing party beamed down for a routine survey."

"Is Mr. Spock with him?" McCoy was reluctant to ask a question to which the answer had once been so obvious.

The Duty Officer hesitated. "No, sir, the Captain took two security guards - and Yeoman Adams."

"Thank you. McCoy out."

Bitterly McCoy turned off the intercom and sat on the bed with his head in his hands. He didn't have to ask where Spock would be. He would be hiding in his cabin, though 'hiding' was not a word he would admit to, while Kirk spent the night on the planet with that girl. As the terrible sadness of it all overwhelmed him, exhaustion overcame him, and leaning back on Kirk's bed, he slept.

...And gasped, writhing, as pain unimaginable forced him awake. Filling his mind, twisting his thoughts, seeming as though it would shatter his very brain to pieces.

Dimly he heard himself sobbing. Was unable to move, even though he knew he had to get help - and quickly.

With superhuman effort he forced himself to roll off the bed, and inching his way across the floor, finally managed to stab the emergency button.

When next he awoke he was once again lying on Kirk's bed, the cabin lights dimmed. With a groan he pulled himself into a sitting position, the dull metallic taste in his mouth telling him that someone had given him a pretty potent painkiller and stimulant recently, and saw Spock sitting bowed at the table, head in his hands.

And knew with terrible certainty that everything was utterly, horribly wrong.

"Spock! What's happened?" His voice came out as a weak croak.

The Vulcan raised tired eyes to his and McCoy saw that he was either unable or unwilling to reply.

Forcing himself to get up, the doctor groped for his medikit and taking a mild stimulant injected it into the Vulcan's arm before he had time to protest.

"Spock!"

Anyone else he would have shaken. As it was he was afraid to touch the Vulcan, not sure if his mental shields would be intact, and afraid that the onslaught of additional emotions would be too much for him to bear. McCoy spoke slowly, trying to inject a tone of command into his voice.

"Spock, you must tell me what happened."

After a moment the Vulcan raised his head, and the effort he made to control himself was visible.

"Doctor." His voice was barely a whisper. "Doctor, I believe we have been the victims of an elaborate conspiracy.

"When I came to this cabin after you pressed the emergency button, I was at a loss to know what was causing your pain. On minute examination of the room, however, I found..." and here he took from the table a small silver object the size of a small button, "...this."

McCoy nodded impatiently.

"It is a small transmitter," Spock went on, "the nature of which is so alien that I can only guess at its precise method of functioning. But its purpose is clear.

"It is programmed so that when Jim lay on the bed, and only when he slept, it would send out waves of identical pattern to his brain waves, thus superimposing its own patterns onto his. The reason it caused you such pain is because it was only patterned to his frequency. Had you not managed to roll off the bed when you did, the conflicting patterns might well have killed you.

"Whoever, or whatever, planted it made the somewhat erroneous assumption that only the Captain would ever sleep there. And indeed, for the past few weeks they have been correct.

"I could not believe, however, that Jim's mind would accept, even in sleep, such an attempt at domination. On examining the remains of the food on the tray in his cabin, I found small traces of a drug unknown to me but obviously intended to render him less able to resist such a takeover."

"Yeoman Adams?" McCoy's voice was a horrified whisper.

"Indeed, Doctor, it appears that there is no Yeoman Adams. Or at least, the Yeoman Adams registered with Starfleet no longer exists, but her form has been taken - by what, I do not know." Here his voice all but broke, and he rested his head once more in his hands.

"We have both of us betrayed him, Doctor. We both saw only the obvious, and did not question that our doubts of him were illogical. If it were anyone but a girl we might have questioned, but whoever -

or whatever - has done this knows us well enough to realise that such a situation was sufficiently plausible to fool the crew. What I cannot believe is that I, too, fell prey to the same suspicions."

"But why are we sitting here?" McCoy was puzzled, angry. "We must have the landing party beamed up before they suspect that we know."

"It is too late, Doctor. All contact with the landing party has been lost. If you had not come here to Jim's cabin, I doubt whether either of us would yet have thought to contact him. He is somewhere on the planet below, and we have no way of finding him."

"But Spock!" Hope sprang in McCoy's heart. "You've always been able to find Jim. You're in contact with him even when he..." He faltered and broke off at the look in the Vulcan's eyes.

"Last night," Spock spoke so low that McCoy could barely hear him, "I broke all the Vulcan rules and attempted to contact Jim's mind while he slept. I was met with a wall of hostility and rejection. I realise now that I must have touched the waves coming from the transmitter, so attuned to his mind that I could not distinguish them from his own. But as a result of that contact I..." McCoy strained forward, the words were so quiet, "...I broke the telepathic link between us. He is lost to us, Doctor, and if he has been systematically drugged and subjected to who knows what thoughts over the past few weeks, I doubt that he will be able to put up a fight for long."

It fell to McCoy to take action now. The Vulcan seemed too dispirited and depressed. As the doctor reviewed what Spock had told him, an alarm bell went off in his mind. It was illogical that the Vulcan had given in so quickly to doubts and suspicions.

A thorough examination of Spock's cabin found no transmitter, but the food supplements he took regularly were found to contain traces of a rare depressive drug which would leave no trace in the victim's body but would increase his doubts in himself and weaken his ability to think rationally.

One thought burned in McCoy's mind. They had to find Jim, telepathic link or no. He would not reproach himself now for also doubting his friend, or for the fact that he had unwittingly been administering the drugged compound to Spock; there would be time for that later. For now, he gave the Vulcan a strong antidote to the drug he had received, and ordering him to rest for an hour in his cabin began, with Scott's help, to organise a landing party.

It seemed to Kirk that he had been forever in this place. Not so much a room as a... non-room. A bubble of existence in which he lived alone, the boundaries a shimmering purple field of force, and no other being ever to come near him. He remembered nothing since their arrival at the Starbase, and even that incident seemed hazy, unreal, as if seen through a distance of centuries, rather than merely days.

In some deep recess of his mind he knew that he had been drugged, and was probably hallucinating, but the drug caused a fever to burn through his body, so that when the pitchers of fluid appeared near him he drank of them thirstily, even while knowing that they contained more of what was destroying him.

In the beginning his mind had reached out in despair, not even remembering for sure who it was he was trying to contact but expecting an answer from someone. But his cries went unanswered, and despite himself he began to believe that what the voices were saying to him was true.

For there were always the voices. Day and night - although no such time existed in this place - the voices whispered in his head, telling him over and over that all his friends and loved ones were dead, that the Federation no longer existed, and that he alone survived in this time warp of a bubble into the future. And that unless he would allow them to probe deep into his mind and share with them all his knowledge of the past, they would leave him forever alone in the darkness.

He wouldn't believe them. Couldn't. But why did no-one answer his mind's cries for help?

And he knew that very soon the solitude would overwhelm him, and he would tell them everything. If only they would stop, and come, and take away his loneliness and despair.

The briefing room door slid open to admit a very different First Officer. Those at the table were startled by the change in him. Though still pale and tired, his calmness and determination were in marked contrast to the dejection they had become accustomed to. Many wondered how the situation had been allowed to go on for so long without arousing suspicion, but the change had been a gradual one, and at the time, believable. With hindsight, much of what had happened during the last few weeks seemed confusing and implausible.

The Vulcan sat down at the table and his sense of purpose communicated itself to all of them. Now their enemy was known, and they had something definite to fight against.

The empty chair at the table reminded them all how high the stakes were.

Spock spoke quickly. "Gentlemen, since leaving Starbase 12, we must consider that we have been under a form of mental attack. We cannot know at this stage whether Yeoman Rand had a genuine accident, or whether it was engineered, but either way it provided an opportunity for some alien force to come onto the ship in the powerful position of Yeoman to the Captain. It thus had free access to both the Captain's cabin and to his food and drink. Its immediate purpose seems to have been to so change the perceptions of the crew that it would be possible to abduct the Captain from the ship without anyone becoming concerned for several hours.

"Its long-term purpose is unclear. As we have been fortunate enough to become aware of its existence earlier than expected, we must hope that the Captain is still alive."

"And what's the good of knowing about it if we can't find it?" McCoy's impatience could no longer be contained.

Spock continued as if there had been no interruption. "Our sensors can find no life-forms on the planet below. We must assume, therefore, that the alien is of a form previously unknown to us, and that it is shielding the Captain and the security guards.

"It did occur to me, however, that as it was one of the last to beam down, the transporter memory circuits should have stored its energy pattern. The bridge is now scanning for this pattern on the planet's surface."

"What are you going to do if they find it?" Again it was McCoy who asked the question.

"I shall beam down alone to the surface." Spock ignored the startled looks around the table. "I am the only one with the necessary shielding to withstand any mental attack. If I cannot obtain the release of the Captain and the others in, say, half an hour, then Mr. Scott will direct full phasers onto the planet and destroy it. If the alien penetrates the minds of both the Captain and myself, the information it obtains will be invaluable to it, and will pose a great risk to the Federation. It cannot be allowed to leave here. It will be easier to hold out against it knowing that there is a finite time for which to do so."

Any arguments were forestalled by the intercom from the bridge.

"Mr. Spock, we have a faint energy reading on the planet below." The officer's voice was clearly elated.

"Acknowledged." Spock turned off the intercom. "If there are no further comments then I will go to the transporter room."

"Just one comment, Spock." McCoy spoke with determination. "I'm going with you."

He readied himself with all the answers to all the objections he knew Spock would make. He didn't know whether to be worried or gratified when the Vulcan merely nodded.

In the transporter room, Spock dismissed the operator and faced McCoy.

"I think you should reconsider, Doctor. You do not possess any mental shielding. Your mind will be vulnerable to attack, and you will be a danger both to us and to Jim."

The use of the Captain's name evaporated any anger McCoy might have felt, but his need to find his friend was as great as Spock's.

"I'm going with you." He felt like a stubborn child pleading with the Vulcan. "If Jim is hurt he might need immediate attention. And I'm as much to blame for this situation as you are."

Their eyes met and held across the room, McCoy determined not to give in. After what seemed an eternity, Spock nodded.

"Very well. But then permit me to link my mind on a light level to yours, so that you will be shielded from immediate attack."

The doctor was taken aback. Part of him was strangely touched by the offer, but a larger part was repelled and afraid of the loss of privacy such a meld would require. It didn't help knowing that in this case the Vulcan was right; he would be a liability if not properly protected.

Spock's voice broke into his thoughts, and his tone was gentle.

"Doctor, do not be afraid. The link will be no deeper than the time with the Melkotians. It is, however, absolutely necessary."

Finally, McCoy nodded. But he could not prevent himself from taking a step backwards as the Vulcan moved towards him.

The place they materialised in could have been on Earth, and McCoy would have found it pleasant were it not for the purpose of their mission. A mountainous region, pitted with caves, warmed by the newly rising sun, with light breezes blowing and the air only slightly thinner than that of his home planet.

But across the entrance to one of the caves pulsed a strange purple energy field, and as one they moved towards it.

Their steps were halted by a shimmering form that appeared from nowhere. Only partly transparent, they could still see the cave mouth through it, but it hovered in their way and made no pretence now at assuming any Human shape.

Spock wasted no time on preliminaries. "We will not leave this place without our friend."

McCoy could not be sure if the alien spoke words aloud, or whether he just heard them in his mind. He could feel it trying to penetrate his thoughts, and Spock's mental shielding repelling it through the link. Its voice felt high and clear.

*"He is not yours. He is mine now! You forfeited your claim to him when you severed the mind link between you. You left him alone, and I will fill the void you have created and he will confide in me."*

McCoy felt a surge of hope as he realised from the alien's words that the Captain must still be alive, and had not yet been broken.

Spock was speaking. "If you know enough about us to know that our minds have been linked, then you must also know that we will not allow him to be taken by you. If necessary, we will destroy both him and ourselves to prevent it."

It was as if the alien laughed, its derision was so plain. *You of this galaxy are fools, and think that physical force is everything. My people do not use physical methods. We can control minds, and as such can destroy your societies from within. Those who went before me told of the great Federation and its Starships, and of all the Starships the Enterprise was the best.*

*"I told them that I could disrupt even the Enterprise, and I have succeeded. Your friendship is famed throughout this galaxy, but look how easily I have destroyed it! And not only that... I have your Captain as my prisoner, and soon he will willingly tell me all the other things I need to know before I can tell my people where your weakest places are."*

The Vulcan spoke grimly. "You have not succeeded. We have discovered your plan and we will take back our Captain. If you do not release him our ship will destroy this planet, and you will die with us. You may not use physical force, but you are not immune to its effects."

For a long time the alien was silent.

"The only reason you are here now is because of him!" A great wave of hatred lashed out at McCoy, causing him to stagger despite the mental shielding. "I had not been informed by those that went before me that there was a third person to be dealt with. Were it not for his interference you would not have come looking for your Captain until long after he had told me what I needed to know. You would have been welcome to what remained of him. Next time, I will be better prepared. Do not think you are safe because you have gained a temporary respite!"

And then, unbelievably, it was gone, and the barrier at the cave mouth with it.

McCoy started to move, but the Vulcan's hand gripped his arm. "Wait, Doctor - it may be a trap." Opening his communicator he signalled the bridge. "Mr. Scott, are you still scanning for those energy readings?"

"Aye, sir," Scott's voice was puzzled, "but there's no trace of them now."

"If they reappear, Mr. Scott, fire full phasers at once. We are entering an enclosed space, and could be trapped within it. Have the transporter room stand by."

Scott's voice was reluctant. "Aye, sir. Acknowledged."

Then at last they broke into a run and entered the cave, their eyes struggling to adjust to the darkness.

The first thing they noticed was the two security guards lying unconscious near the entrance.

Spock, being better equipped to see in the dark, moved quickly back into the interior. The doctor made sure the two guards could be safely left for a while, then followed.

In a dim recess at the back of the cave, on a rocky ledge, they found their Captain, barely conscious but alive.

Spock knelt and gently drew the fevered body towards him. "Jim!" There was agony in the Vulcan's voice.

McCoy quickly passed his mediscanner over Kirk, and was shocked by the high degree of mental and physical trauma it revealed.

"Spock!" He touched the Vulcan gently on the arm. "We must get him back to the Enterprise at once."

Grimly Spock lifted up his friend as McCoy signalled the ship. In the dim light of the cave Kirk's eyes burned bright with fever, and they could not be sure if he had recognised them. But as they stood with the guards waiting for the beam to claim them, with an effort Kirk moved his hand and gripped the Vulcan's arm as though it were a lifeline.

For two days Kirk drifted between unconsciousness and delirium as the drugs he had been given slowly worked themselves out of his system. His body was so overloaded that McCoy was reluctant to administer any further medication, and thought it best to allow time to be the healer until the effects wore off.

Spock accompanied the Captain to sickbay and sat a silent vigil in the corner of the room, for which McCoy was grateful, for Kirk would often call Spock's name in the depth of some nightmare.

But as soon as Kirk lapsed into a more normal sleep the Vulcan quietly left sickbay for the bridge, and made further enquiries only through the intercom. The doctor, himself overtired and emotionally strained, could not summon up the strength to go after him.

Now, on the third night, McCoy looked up from his desk to see his friend's eyes watching him across the room, clear and lucid, but... afraid.

"Bones, has something happened to Spock?" Kirk struggled to rise off the bed.

"Hush now, nothing's happened to Spock." McCoy was across the room in a second, and gently pushed his friend back onto the pillows. "Sleep now. We'll talk in the morning."

"Then why...?" Kirk struggled to clear the thoughts in his mind, but the effort exhausted him, and he was unable to prevent sleep overpowering him.

McCoy thought grimly, *You want to know why Spock isn't here as he would normally be. And perhaps, even though you're not a telepath, you sense that he has somehow cut himself off from you?*

McCoy realised with a sinking heart that he was not looking forward to the conversation they would have to have the following day.

In the morning, however, Kirk was calm and rational, though still very weak, and McCoy could no longer leave the questions in his eyes unanswered. So, pulling up a chair, and making sure they were alone, the doctor told his Captain and friend all that had taken place since the Enterprise had left Starbase 12, sparing him none of the details.

Afterwards, Kirk was very quiet. "And Spock blames himself, is that what you're saying?" The hurt was evident in his voice.

McCoy thought for a while before replying. "No, I don't think he does, not now. None of us acted brilliantly, but we were all under the influence of something not previously encountered. Although initially he reproached himself, especially for attempting a mental contact without permission, I think he's logical enough to see that he acted whilst under the influence of drugs, and was not to blame for what happened. Years ago he might have tried to suppress any feelings of guilt and been ashamed of them. Now I think he's sufficiently matured to accept the Human half of his character, and not to blame it."

"Then why hasn't he been to see me? He must know I bear him no grudge."

McCoy chose his words carefully. "Jim, I think he's afraid. This.. alien... used your friendship as a kind of weapon against you. I think Spock is worried that if the two of you re-establish your previous relationship, it could once again expose you to danger. By keeping his distance, and not offering to re-form



whatever link the two of you used to have, in a strange way he's trying to protect you."

Kirk was horrified. Still weakened by his recent ordeal, it was only now that the full enormity of the situation began to sink in.

"But Bones, he's right. If a friendship between two races such as ours is so rare that it invites comment, it will also attract attempts to destroy it. Perhaps it would be best if we both left things as they stand."

McCoy smiled gently. "I see. So both of you are going to be very noble and self-sacrificing and keep things on a strictly formal basis. And this is supposed to be better for both of you, and for the ship?" He leaned forward. "Jim, for each time your relationship is a liability, there are a hundred times it is your strength. You can't both deny yourselves possible years of friendship because some day they might work against you!

"We know this alien's energy pattern now. We can programme our computers to scan for it, as they do for other hostile life forms. And anyway, now you've been forewarned, so you can guard against such a thing in future.

"All relationships make the participants vulnerable to some extent, but how empty would your life be without Spock? And if someday the unthinkable happens, you'll cope. You've loved and lost Gary and Edith," he ignored the spasm of pain that crossed Kirk's face as he heard those names, "and many, many others. My guess is, you've come out stronger, and don't regret having known them, even though they're dead.

"There's an old Earth saying that goes, 'Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all', and to a large extent it still holds true."

Kirk was silent for a long time after McCoy had finished, and the doctor wisely let him think

Finally, Kirk sighed. "You're right, of course. I'm only sorry you've had to remind me about such basic truths. What do you suggest I do?"

McCoy smiled. "Well, Jim, I think it's up to you to make the first move. Humans have more experience in dealing with friendships than Vulcans do. The Vulcans have no history of emotional contact with people outside their family bonding system. You'll have to convince Spock that the risks involved in resuming your friendship are worth taking. His Human half knows it already, but I think he's having trouble convincing his Vulcan half!"

As McCoy rose to leave, Kirk reached out and squeezed the doctor's arm. "Bones, don't ever underestimate how much I value your friendship, too. I know how much this whole experience has affected you."

Their eyes held until finally the doctor turned away, embarrassed.

McCoy pressed the intercom button. "Mr. Spock, I need to see you in sickbay immediately."

The Vulcan's voice answered at once. "Is the Captain all right, Doctor?"

McCoy smiled, but did not allow his voice to show anything but anxiety. "Mr. Spock, it's important that I see you in sickbay. I'll discuss it with you then."

He could almost hear the Vulcan's internal battle as his concern struggled with his determination to stay away. Then,

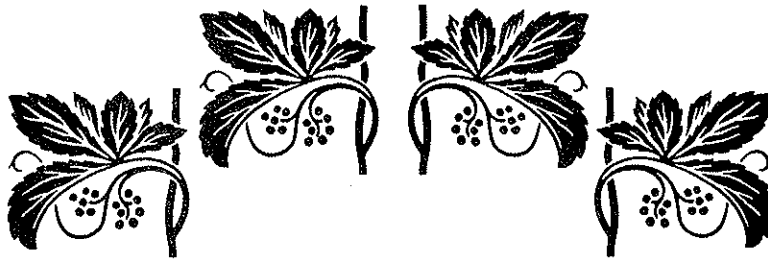
"Acknowledged. I'll be down at once."

The intercom went dead.

McCoy lifted his head and looked across at his Captain. Their eyes met, and he smiled.

"Well, he's all yours, Jim. Call me if you need me."

And allowing the door to slide shut behind him, he left.



## RELAXATION

A game of chess.  
 Watch. Concentrate. Consider.  
*Rook to queen three.*  
 An obvious attack; the danger is not there.  
 Examine the possibilities.  
 The queen is sitting easily, not threatening.  
 The bishop lurks in wait, but  
 Is hampered by that pawn. If it were moved...  
*Bishop to queen's knight four.*  
 He cannot move that pawn now, or he leaves  
 A knight exposed to capture.  
*Bishop to king's rook three?* That makes no sense!  
 And yet I know it likely  
 That his illogical mind has planned ahead.  
*Bishop to king's rook three.* It does not threaten;  
 It seems a wasted move.  
 It cannot be, but yet I cannot see  
 Its purpose. Ignore it.  
 Advance this pawn a space, and free  
 A route for queen or bishop.  
*Queen to queen six, and checkmate.* Checkmate?  
 Yes. I have no escape.  
 Now I can see the purpose of that other move;  
 Not logical - but well played!



# R & R

*"The Peacock Circle's Festival  
Of song and dance and martial art  
On Perry's Planet, to which all  
Are welcome if they'll play a part,  
Today will start*

*With single combat: choice of arms  
Is absolutely what you please."  
Galactic beings on the grass  
Admire the peacocks in the trees  
And lounge at ease.*

*"Kor versus Sulu! That's a cinch!  
I hate to take your credits, friend..."  
"Don't be so sure: you'll see him flinch.  
Muscle will conquer in the end;  
He'll have him penned."*

*Peacocking is in the eyes  
Peacocking is in the stance  
Sulu's half-naked (no surprise)  
But see his peacock pride advance  
Just watch him prance*

*A stamp: One! Two! his blade shoots out  
Towards his adversary's nose  
Winner of many a fencing bout  
Our bantam champion's on his toes  
And fears no foes*

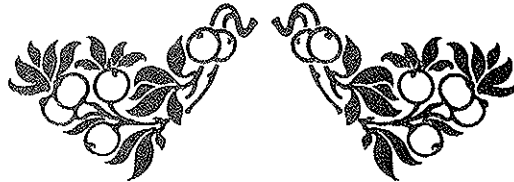
*You Klingon oaf with methods crude.  
Sulu's an expert - oh, he's good -  
But your technique is rough and rude  
That broadsword - is it made of wood? -  
You've hacked and hewed*

*But all to no avail, while he  
Makes rings around you with his blade  
He pinks you here, he slashes there  
He dances back and forth on air  
And wins the final accolade.  
His friends applaud all round the glade:  
    *"Pal, put it there!"*  
    *We've got it made!"**

*But Klingons can't accept defeat  
You drop your sword and grab a rock  
Our Sulu's hearing is acute  
His ears are trained by Mr. Spock  
And whirling round - you're still in shock -  
He neatly drops you at his feet...  
Better admit - he's got you beat!*

The festival is in full swing  
 The victors strut, the peacocks scream:  
 The folk-dancers have done their thing,  
 The sun descends, time's on the wing...  
 Dissolved in the Transporter beam  
 Sulu wakes up -  
 "Wow! What a dream!"

Pac Deacon



## QUALITY

Behind Spock's mask  
 There lurks a hidden smile  
 The actor's guile  
 Makes us afraid to ask

Although we feel  
 Compelled by twofold charm  
 Will it do harm  
 To know which one is real?

If style's the man  
 Then both are touched by grace  
 They share one face  
 And use it as they can

These are two souls  
 In one man intertwined  
 One heart one mind  
 In him are both the poles

Between them flows  
 The life-creating power  
 That sparks the flower  
 That out of nothing rose

The artist's spells  
 His personal imprint keep  
 He must tap deep  
 His own unfathomed wells

Day after day  
 You fashioned what you sought  
 Your gradual thought  
 Imagined every trait

We need not ask,  
 We know, that all the while  
 There broods a smile  
 Behind your Vulcan mask

Pac Deacon

# A FRIEND IN NEED

by

Synda Surgenor

I never thought I'd live to see the day - but I did!

That pointy-eared walking computer called me "Friend"!

Not in so many words, of course - that would have been too much to expect! - and he wasn't exactly his normal self at the time, but call me "Friend" he did, nevertheless.

It happened like this.

I'd noticed that he was off his food and growing ever more irritable - for a Vulcan, that is. After a day or two of this I dropped a gentle hint that perhaps I should run a medi-scanner over him. At which suggestion your normally imperturbable Vulcan threatened to break my neck if I didn't stop prying into his affair.

Now, I know the two of us have this running feud going, but that was over-doing it a bit. Besides, he sounded as if he meant it.

So I had a word with Jim, and while I was doing so we were treated to a grandstand view of that same Vulcan's attempt to brain Chris Chapel with a bowl of that revolting plomeek soup.

Jim got worried!

Next day he got even more upset. Spock had asked for - no, demanded is a better word! - immediate shore leave on Vulcan for an unspecified reason. Jim had diverted the ship to take him there, but then had to return to our original course when the Altair VI inauguration ceremony was brought forward. Then he discovered that Spock had re-diverted the ship back on course for Vulcan.

(If you're getting confused, don't worry about it - by this time so was everyone else. Poor young Chekov didn't know if he was coming or going!)

When Jim taxed Spock with the latest course change, Spock scared him silly by saying he didn't remember anything about it, and asking to be locked up.

Jim ordered him down to Sickbay for a complete medical.

Spock was not pleased - but then he never is when he has to place himself in my tender care. I threw the medical text book at him - figuratively speaking - and I didn't like the results one little bit.

My medical equipment usually has a nervous breakdown when it confronts his peculiar physiology - this time it had convulsions as well. In all my years as a Doctor I'd never seen readouts like it. I was convinced that Spock knew what was wrong with him, but when I asked he just went green around the points of those ears and clammed up like an Aldebaran shellmouth.

I didn't bother arguing with him. There's only one man on board ship who can persuade that Vulcan to open up, and it sure as hell ain't me!

So I went to Jim and told him what I knew; that Spock would die if he didn't get to Vulcan in a very few days; that the hormonal imbalance building within him would tear his mind and body apart. The unconfirmed suspicions I had as to the cause of that imbalance I kept to myself for the time being.

Jim headed for Spock's quarters like a pin to a magnet. He was in there exactly thirteen minutes - I know, I timed him. When he emerged, he too had joined the ranks of the Aldebaran shellmouths. He also looked worried sick.

I listened while he contacted Admiral Komack and tried to persuade him to let us divert to Vulcan, even although it meant arriving late at the inauguration - all without giving a single reason.

It didn't work, of course. But we diverted anyway.

I spent the time biting my nails and worrying about both of 'em. (Only don't tell Spock he was included - I'd never live it down!)

But there we were at last, about to orbit Vulcan. And there were the three of us, me, Jim and Spock, in the turbolift heading for the Bridge.

So what happened?

That - Vulcan! - shocked me speechless by paying me a compliment, that's what happened.

"Doctor," he said, fixing his eyes a couple of inches to one side of my left ear, "it is obvious that you have surmised my problem. My compliments on your insight."

While I was trying to get my breath back, I couldn't help thinking that although he may call me a witch-doctor when he's trying to be nasty, I ain't entirely stupid. I didn't need a computer to add the two and two of hormones and extreme coyness on his part and get four equals something to do with reproduction.

I'm a Doctor, not a moron!

I'd said as much to Jim the previous evening, and he must have passed it on. He hadn't confirmed or denied anything, but he ain't half as good at controlling his expression as Spock is, and I'd known right away that I'd hit the nail on the head.

When I recovered from the shock, Spock was telling Jim that he was going to go crazy. He, Spock, I mean, not Jim!

"Something happens to us, Captain," he was saying. "It is almost an insanity, which doubtless you would find distasteful."

"Why should I?" Jim asked. "You've always been most patient with my kinds of madness."

Come to think of it, I've wakened up in my quarters a few times when the only way I could have arrived there was via a Vulcan

shoulder, so I guess I could say the same thing!

"In that case, Captain," Spock said, "will you beam down to the planet surface and stand with me? There is a brief ceremony."

"I'd be delighted, Spock," Jim answered. "But is it permitted?"

"It is my right!" Spock said in the tone of voice which boded ill for anyone trying to prevent it. "By tradition, the male is attended by his closest friends."

Jim's face lit up as though the sun had just come out. He has called Spock his friend more times than I can remember, but to the best of my knowledge this was the first time Spock had ever returned the compliment. Oh, he had *acted* like a friend often enough, he just never came right out and said the word before. And he did it in public - i.e. in front of me!

The lift started slowing down as it neared the Bridge level. Jim grinned across at me and I grinned back, enjoying his unconcealed delight at being counted among Spock's "closest friends".

I was so busy feeling good for Jim that I was totally unprepared when the bombshell of the century was tossed at me.

Spock turned his head and looked at me. Straight in the eye this time, not over my shoulder.

"I also request that McCoy accompany me."

My jaw dropped.

I felt as though I ought to sit down and put my head between my knees. Or perhaps pinch myself, and I'd wake up and everything would be normal.

*Did he realise what he'd just said?*

He did!

His face was as neutral as I'd ever seen it, except for the expression in his eyes. He was doing his level best to hide it, and not succeeding; behind the attempted "impassive Vulcan" facade something hesitant, almost shy, peered out at me.

*He was calling me "Friend", just as he'd named Jim, and he was unsure and nervous - Spock, nervous! - about my reaction!*

Well! I know we argue about everything under a thousand suns, and we've exchanged some pretty sharp insults as well, but, dammit, despite all that grief I hand out to him I actually *like* the green-blooded, pointy-eared son-of-a-whatchamacallit! I must be a better actor than I think I am if he doesn't know that, just as I've known for a long time that he feels the same way about me, even though I never thought I'd live long enough to hear him say so. I've always thought it would take the Klingon mind-sifter at least to drag an open admission of friendship out of either of us!

So the only reaction he had to fear from me was that I might drop dead from shock and believe me, I was tempted!

Then I saw Jim's face over Spock's shoulder, and decided to live a little longer. If there's one thing that can't be said about our

revered Captain, it's that he's slow on the uptake; he'd recognised straight off the effect Spock's words had on me, and he was having a ball at my expense!

I fired a glare at him that should have fried him on the spot, but only succeeded in driving him nearer to hysterics. I promised myself I'd get my revenge at his next medical; I can be very nasty when I've a mind to be! I altered the glare to a sweet smile, and saw him get the message and begin to sober up.

I turned my attention back to Spock. His carefully created shell of imperturbability was just beginning to crack - I guess the variety of expression flitting across my face was giving him cause. So I pulled myself together and put him out of his misery. I donned my best Southern Gentleman pose and said in my very best accent,

"I shall be honoured, sir."

For just a split second I could have sworn he was going to do something Human - heave a sigh of relief, for example. Then the shutters slammed down again, and he stepped out onto the Bridge ahead of me, the (almost) perfect Vulcan.

Hah!

He'd better watch out as well.

I don't like shocks of that magnitude, they do nasty things to my blood pressure, and I'm getting too old for that sort of thing. When I recover from this one, I'll get my own back, just you wait and see if I don't!

I know exactly how to do it, too - a way that appeals to the sneaky side of my nature.

When this business is all over, and that computer between those pointed ears of his gets back to normal working, he'll realise just how completely he's given himself away. He's let the cat out of the bag this time, all right; he can't go back to being Mr. Super-cool, I-ain't-got-no-feelings Vulcan after this! He's got 'em - and he's shown 'em - and there's no way he can deny their existence any more, no matter how much he may want to.

So I'll let him stew in his own juice, just long enough to get worried about what I'm gonna do about it...

Then I'll call him "Friend" out loud - in public - and we'll see how he survives the shock!





# THE RESCUE

by

Joyce Devlin

There I was standing on the bridge of the Enterprise trying to railroad Jim down to sickbay for his quarterly medical when it happened. Uhura put the finishing touches to my argument when she announced,

"Captain, I've picked up a distress signal."

"Can you pinpoint it, Lieutenant?"

"It's a standard automatic distress signal radiating from the planet B104, sir," Uhura informed him.

"Spock?"

"Planet B104 is off limits. Planet type Class M, its inhabitants are not ready for outside contact, being at the same stage of development as Earth's American Indians of the 18th century."

"Mr. Sulu, set course for Planet B104 and establish a standard orbit. Gentlemen, let's investigate that signal." Jim issued his orders.

"Jim, that's an off-limits, Prime Directive, Do Not Interfere planet. You can't just beam down." I spoke for the first time since the distress signal had come to light.

"I know that, Bones, and no, I've not gone off my head. Spock, see what the computer has on ships disappearing in this sector."

Spock had as usual anticipated Jim's request and had all the information ready. "None, sir."

"None? Spock, are you sure?"

"Yes, sir." Spock raised an eyebrow at the question.

"What about ships passing through this sector and never arriving at their destinations?" I asked.

Spock bent his head over the hooded viewer on the computer and after a few moments he straightened up.

"We are the first vessel to pass through this sector of space since the survey ship Eagle discovered the planet 2.65 years ago. However, the long range shuttle Alpha1's course would have taken her along the sector's border on her route. She is listed as missing with all hands."

"I remember hearing about that. It was six months or so ago," I piped up.

"Wasn't that the shuttle that was taking Captain Johnston to the USS California?"

"Yes, Captain."

"Uhura, can you identify the type of signal?" Kirk asked the Communications Officer.

"Yes, sir. It's a Starfleet Class One priority on automatic," she responded.

"Right. Spock, how many were on the Alpha1?" Kirk asked.

"Captain Johnston, Lieutenant-Commander Jadela Kirk, and Lieutenants Jamison and Brown. Captain Johnston and Lieutenant-Commander Kirk were being taken to the California to replace Captain Ross and Lieutenant-Commander Norman, who were killed in a transporter malfunction while returning from R & R at Starbase 6."

"One of these days that damn thing will be the death of us," I retorted.

"Bones." Jim's tone of voice made me shut up abruptly.

"Go on, Spock."

"Lieutenants Jamison and Brown were newly assigned to the California, and had been picked up at Starbase 5. Records informs me that Starbase 6 had no senior command personnel to spare, so the command team had been transferred to Starbase 6 and the California."

"That's hardly surprising, as Starbase 6 is only a supply base," Jim muttered.

"Approaching the planet, Captain," Sulu informed us.

"After six months, Jim, there won't be enough food or water on the shuttle to last that long," I pointed out, adding, "and there's nothing to say they survived the landing. Even if they didn't crash, the natives would have discovered them by now, surely?"

"I take it you don't know Lieutenant-Commander Jadela Kirk?" Jim asked, letting a smile cross his face.

"No. A relative of yours?" I questioned, picking up on the name.

"Well, not exactly immediate family, Bones. If I remember my genealogical tree correctly, she's one of my grandfather's brother's son's daughters, or something like that. But that's beside the point - if there are Starfleet officers down there then we are duty bound to rescue them."

"Standard orbit established, Captain," Sulu informed the bridge.

"Scan the surface for the shuttle, Spock."

"Already scanning, sir."

After what seemed like hours Spock finally announced, "I have pinpointed the shuttle, sir."

"Intact?"

"The hull is intact, Captain, secluded in dense undergrowth,"

Spock informed us.

"Camouflaged, Spock?" I questioned.

"I believe I just said that, Doctor."

"Don't start, you two," Jim warned. "Camouflaged, Spock? Are you sure?"

"Unless the growth rate of the planet's vegetation is in fact 100 times that of, say, Terran grass, yes, Captain, I am sure."

"Then there are survivors?" I enquired.

"It would appear so, Bones, which presents me with one very big headache. How do we rescue them without breaking the Prime Directive?"

"Logically the Prime Directive has already been breached, Captain."

"Yes, Spock, but not, so far as we know, intentionally." Jim hit the direct link to Engineering on his command chair. "Kirk to Engineering."

"Scott here, Captain."

"Scotty, is there any way a long range shuttle, assumed at the moment to be disabled, could be brought aboard?" Kirk asked.

"That depends. Is it in space or on a planet, sir?"

"Planet."

"Not unless it can establish an orbit long enough for us to get a tractor beam on it."

"I thought that, Scotty. Kirk out. Well, gentlemen, we'll just have to beam down and see what we find. Spock, are there any settlements nearby?"

"No, Captain, there are none. The shuttle is situated on an island."

"That's one thing in our favour. Bones, be ready to beam down in 15 minutes."

I left the bridge and headed for sickbay. I was sure Jim wasn't telling all he knew, but about what I couldn't guess.

We materialised in a small clearing beside a waterfall, and believe you me, it was beautiful, the water rushing down a series of steps cut into the rock face by the water itself into a medium size pool of crystal clear water.

"Which way, Spock?" Jim asked.

Spock scanned the area as he pivoted round on one foot before he replied, "One hundred meters that way, sir." He started off into the wooded area to the left of the pool.

We'd gone exactly a hundred meters when we came to another large clearing. We looked around carefully but were unable to see anything out of the ordinary.

"Where is it, Spock?" Jim asked.

"We are no more than ten feet from it."

To one side of the clearing were what looked like large brown bracken plants. Spock crossed to them and slowly pulled the leaves to one side, to reveal the shuttle.

"Natural or not?" I asked.

"Not," Jim responded as he removed one of the plants from the ground; there were no roots on it.

The security guards were placed on lookout as Spock, Jim and I climbed into the shuttle. Inside it looked like a bomb had hit it; chairs were overturned, and a bulkhead had buckled.

"Well, I'd say from the mess in here there was a crash landing." Jim spoke first.

"Correct, Captain."

"Let's find the ship's log, Spock."

No sooner had Jim suggested the log when Spock flipped two switches and the hologram image of a female appeared on the screen.

"I am Lieutenant-Commander Jadela Kirk, sole survivor of this party. My Captain and subordinates were killed on impact. I escaped with little or no injury. I have burned the dead according to Starfleet rules; the ship I camouflaged as best I could. No contact has been made with the natives so far. My ship was sent off course in a wild spin by a power overload in the port engine, with gravitational distortion. We were all rendered unconscious." The female's face vanished.

"Is that all, Spock?"

"No, there is more, but it will need the ship's computer to enhance it, sir."

"So she's alive, and by the look of that cut above her eye, hurt - or was hurt," I corrected myself. "But where is she?"

"Captain, there's someone approaching," one of the guards called.

We all climbed out of the ship onto the grass.

"Phasers away," Jim ordered as the Lieutenant-Commander came to a stop in front of us.

"Thank goodness someone heard the distress call." She looked directly at Jim, her long black hair hanging loose.

"Lieutenant-Commander Kirk?" Jim questioned.

"Yes, Captain."

I had my medical scanner out and was running it over her, much to her annoyance.

"Doctor, I am perfectly all right."

"Let me be the judge of that," I replied as I puzzled over the readings; they didn't make any sense at all.

"Captain, I'd suggest we return to the Enterprise as soon as possible," Spock advised.

"Yes, Captain. There is a volcano on the island which has become unstable in the last few weeks - the natives have even stopped coming here to pick fruit. I have all the study recordings I made here." She patted a pocket in the survival jacket she wore.

"Kirk to Enterprise."

"Scott here, Captain."

"Six to beam up, Scotty."

"I was just going to call you, sir. There's been a helluva increase in volcanic activity in your area."

Scotty was still reporting as the transporter beam caught us - just in time, for the ground was beginning to crumble.

The ship felt good and solid beneath my feet, I can tell you that, and for once I was grateful to the transporter for zapping us out of harm's way; so on stepping down from the transporter platform I grabbed my prey.

"Jim, I think it would be a wise move if I carried out those medicals now, just in case of any radiation from that volcano. Strange how the ship's sensors didn't detect it."

"All right, Bones, you win," Jim responded in defeat.

"You too, Spock."

"I can assure you I am perfectly all right, Doctor."

"Spock, who's the doctor around here?"

"Why, you are, Dr. McCoy."

"Exactly. So let me be the judge of things," I replied as the transporter room doors slid shut behind us.

Back in sickbay I took reading after reading which made no sense at all from Lieutenant-Commander Kirk. Jim's, Spock's, the security guards' and mine all checked out as normal. As usual Jim was a pound or so overweight, but apart from that, nothing - except for Lieutenant-Commander Kirk.

"Doctor, I am perfectly healthy," she informed me for the twentieth time.

"Doctor, if you would just recalibrate your instruments as you would do for me, but the opposite way round." Spock spoke from behind me, making me jump out of my skin.

"Spock, don't do that!" I retorted.

"Do what?" he asked innocently.

"Creep up on people like that. Anyway, why should I recalibrate my instruments?"

"Because, Doctor, I am a Human/Vulcan hybrid," Jadelia Kirk replied.

"Then why change them round the opposite way to Spock's?" I asked.

"Because, Doctor, I am a Vulcan/Human hybrid," Spock responded.

"Human/Vulcan, Vulcan/Human -it's just the same." I wasn't in a very good mood by then, and I had a king-sized headache.

"Doctor, my father was Human. I have red blood, iron based, not Spock's green copper based blood. My internal organs are in the correct Human placings, as Spock's are in the correct Vulcan placings. My ears and eyebrows are the only physical signs that I am anything other than Human," she explained, drawing back her hair to expose one very elegant Vulcan ear and eyebrow; her hair had been in a middle parting, framing her face and covering the features.

"You're not telepathic as well, are you?" I heard myself saying.

"Yes, Doctor, I am. I also had what Spock did not as a child, a mother's mind touch. Spock is the only Vulcan/Human hybrid, as I am the only Human/Vulcan to have survived infancy. We are the same, but different, both with one Vulcan parent, one Human. That is why you had to reset your instruments. What would read normal for Spock would be haywire for me, and vice versa."

"I take it Jim knew all about this?" I asked.

"Yes, Bones, I did," came the reply from the open sickbay door.

"Then why didn't you say something on the bridge?" I demanded to know.

"And have you start bending my ear about another walking computer? No, Bones. When you start on about medicals you forget to stop, so to save my poor ears from another one of your lectures I sort of avoided the subject and let you find out for yourself."

"You three get out of here and leave me with my headache in peace," was the only reply I could come up with.

Well at least this time neither Jim nor Spock was hurt, but he could have told me about his distant relative being part Vulcan. But no - as usual muggins here was the last to know. Honestly, why does it always happen to this doctor? I mean, I'm just your usual run-of-the-mill country doctor, with one small difference - I'm Chief Medical Officer on the Enterprise, and you'd think that would count for something, but no. It shouldn't happen to a doctor, but nine times out of ten it does to this one.

And I don't nag. Do I?



# HOME THOUGHTS FROM SPACE

Sometimes, when I'm dreaming, I'm with you again.  
We walk together, hand in hand,  
Or romp like little children, chasing each other 'round the pines.  
Or we go swimming in the cool waters of the lake, diving for fish,  
trying to catch their silvery elusiveness with our bare hands.

I never did manage to do that, although you spent many happy, sunny  
afternoons watching my bungling attempts, trying not to laugh as I  
went purple in the face from trying to hold my breath for as long as  
you did. You thought that it would be very rude to laugh at a god.

I remember cooking the fish that you caught for me over a smoky wood  
fire, and burning my fingers and tongue trying to eat the tender  
flesh fresh from the flames.

I like having those dreams. But the dreams that I like best are the  
ones in which I'm back in our hut, and you're asleep in my arms, your  
hair spread out to blanket us both in a mist of pine-scented black  
glory.

I wake up from those dreams of us and I feel... content.

Content?

Yes, I know it's strange to think that I could be content, knowing  
what happened. It wasn't that way at first. I was so crippled by  
grief that I could barely function.

It took me a very long while before I stopped feeling guilty about  
being content; but then all that happened after Edith.

Then I had to make a choice. To let Edith live, or let Edith die.

With you, my beloved, Death made that choice for me. It hurt. It  
still does, and I think that it will forever. But I'm a Starship  
Captain, trained to look at reality, and I know now that life would  
have hurt us both far more than death did that day.

Kirok could have been your husband, happy to be with you and our  
child. James T. Kirk could not have stayed. A little thing called  
duty, not to mention the Prime Directive, would have forced me from  
you and, I can admit it now, (although I dislike myself and my  
motives), I would not have been content to stay.

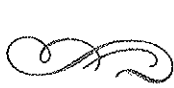
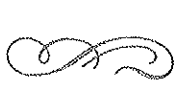
I would have had to leave you behind, for I could not have brought  
you out into my world of Starships, and sterile space.

And you would have been unhappy left alone, perhaps thinking that you  
had somehow failed me, that Kirok had left because you had failed to  
love him enough.

My reality forces me to accept the fact that your love for me killed  
you.

So now I go to bed and sometimes, if I am very lucky, I am with you  
again.

And each time is like the first.



Brenda Kelsey



# STICKS AND STONES

Sickbay is quiet tonight.

Not that I'm complaining, you understand.  
I'd rather that it stayed quiet forever.  
That way there'll be no more men or women...  
...Dying here.

Trouble is, I know that it won't stay quiet.  
We'll get caught up in another 'adventure';  
At least, that's what the Starfleet publicity department calls them.  
Jim calls them 'missions'.  
I've been known to call them... other things,  
Particularly when somebody gets hurt.  
And somebody usually does,  
No matter how careful we are.

I know that we have the best record in the 'Fleet.  
Our casualty figures are the lowest.  
(I still find it unbelievable, but it is true!)  
But we do lose people.  
Navigators; Yeomen; Security Guards; Records Officers.  
It's a wonder we haven't lost Jim.  
Or Spock; or Scotty; (or me!)  
Lord knows, we've come close enough...  
..Too often.  
...Far too often for my peace of mind.

How much longer can I keep it up?  
How many more times will I be allowed to raid the game  
And cheat my eternal enemy of his prize?

And yet, if I were given the choice,  
Would I really want to be anywhere else?

Up here at the sharp end  
Where things happen,  
This is where the heroes are.  
And the heroes are  
...my friends.  
And where my friends are,  
That's where I want to be.

Sounds simple; and it is, really.  
You just have to make a few decisions  
About what's important to you.  
The sort of decisions that people  
Who have never been at the sharp end  
Simply aren't used to making.

"Evening, Jim. Hey, I'm sorry 'bout what I said earlier.  
I was feeling... well... depressed.  
How about you coming down here and we'll have a drink...?"

"Oh, you're playing chess with Spock.  
In that case... Can I come and join you?  
I promise I'll behave.  
It's just that it'd be nice to spend a quiet evening.  
...With my friends."



# CONTACT

by

Krysia Baczala

When you have worked hard all day it is pleasant to sit and rest. So it was that Kirk, Spock and McCoy, returning hot, dusty and very, very tired from a day spent exploring a newly discovered planet, made arrangements to meet later in Kirk's cabin to take their evening meal together.

As men have done for centuries, they stored away the instruments of their toil, attended to matters of cleanliness, and assembled as was arranged.

Kirk had showered and changed quickly, wanting to be ready when his guests arrived. While he dressed he had heard the shift yeoman straightening up his outer room and setting the table. One of the luxuries of rank, he mused, was to be able to say to one's yeoman, 'Mr. Spock and Dr. McCoy will be joining me for dinner in about half an hour', and to find that everything had been efficiently prepared as requested. He noted with approval that drinks had been placed in readiness, as the young yeoman had guessed correctly that they might wish to sit and chat for a while, being too tired to eat heartily straight away. The food, meanwhile, had been set on hold and could be warmed or chilled as required, simply by tapping the necessary command on the food-comp.

McCoy was the first to arrive, sounding the chime, entering on Kirk's, "Come!" and stretching himself luxuriously in one of the armchairs. He declared that his feet were killing him, and gratefully accepted the long cool beer Kirk proffered.

The planet they were studying, designated 25796381 and as yet unnamed - *How unromantic*, thought McCoy - was barely Class M and was remarkably arid. Rock formations and a unique variety of weather forms had captured and held their attention for several days. It had been hot and thirsty work.

McCoy felt happy. He always felt good when he had 'earned his pay', as he put it. He was particularly pleased today because he had successfully tested a much improved plastiskin which he had been developing for some time, and which was intended for use in inhospitable planetary conditions.

He was also happy because Kirk and Spock were happy. The two of them were at their best when they were indulging their primary passion, exploring. Oh yes, he thought, they were good at other things too. Diplomacy, running a tight ship, chess, fighting Klingons, performing with brilliantly intuitive flashes of insight and pure genius, especially in difficult conditions, but after all was said and done, when it came down to it this was what the five-year mission was all about - exploring.

And oh, how they had explored in the last few days. It was the longest hazard free, uninterrupted run of 'business' that McCoy could remember for some time.

He commented on this when Spock joined them a few minutes

later. At Kirk's invitation Spock crossed from the door and helped himself to some fruit juice. McCoy was delighted when Spock actually agreed with his observations, and the three officers soon fell into a companionable conversation, full of delight at the things they had found.

After half an hour or so McCoy's growling stomach gave rise to thoughts of food, and with a hearty appetite they sat down to their evening meal.

There was a buzz of excitement in the air as they discussed the findings of the day. They remarked on the sense of privilege and awesome responsibility they felt at being in the enviable position of being the first to explore new planets. They planned their next day's sortie, their schedule of work, and they discussed a timetable for more observations.

It was because of this purposeful buzz of excitement pervading the air that when the atmosphere in the cabin suddenly changed, they noticed it immediately.

Afterwards Kirk said he thought it was as though all the sound had been somehow muted, or deadened, in an instant. McCoy told of feeling the hair on his neck and arms stand on end with what he chose to call 'goose bumps'. But most of all, what they noticed was the sudden, absolute stillness of the Vulcan.

His hands rested on the table on either side of his plate. He sat stiffly upright as usual, his thin frame slightly rounded at the shoulders, but his head and eyes were just fractionally lowered, and it was as though his attention was somewhere far away from that place.

Kirk, as usual, came straight to the point. "What's the matter?" he asked. Receiving no response he stretched his arm across the table and abandoning tradition, he touched Spock gently on the hand. "Spock," he said, "what is it?"

Spock slowly raised a hand in the universal gesture for 'wait a minute', and his head tilted to one side slightly, almost as though he was trying to listen to something very faint or very distant.

Having received no reply to two urgent questions, Kirk turned to his medical officer for help.

"Bones?"

It was a command as much as a question. McCoy moved around the table and sat down next to Spock. At the same time he produced his scanner, which he never seemed to be without, even while relaxing. Force of habit, he supposed, which had proved useful on more occasions than he cared to count.

"Nothing there, Jim," he said after a moment, shaking his head. Then, "Wait, I'm picking up what seems to be intense low-level brain activity."

As he spoke Spock's eyes closed, his body went limp, and if McCoy's arm hadn't gone around the Vulcan's shoulders very quickly and rested him gently back in his seat, then Spock's head would have fallen back against the wall with a nasty crack.

Kirk, now becoming really concerned, rose from his seat and

asked, "Emergency medical team from sickbay?"

But McCoy stopped him. "No, Jim," he said. "I'm not sure, but..." and he scanned again, "I think he's just fainted."

"Vulcans don't faint!" said Kirk. "Can you give him a stimulant?"

"I'd rather not," said McCoy. "Until I know what caused this, the fewer drugs I pump into his peculiar system the better. Besides, I think he'll come out of it in a minute."

As if on cue Spock stirred and gulped a deep breath. McCoy instantly removed his arm, guessing that the Vulcan would feel sufficiently disorientated already, without the additional confusion picked up from the touch of a worried friend.

His instinct proved correct, for Spock did indeed seem disorientated. With a very un-Vulcan gesture he leaned forward slightly and with his elbows on the table placed his head in his hands and rubbed at his temples.

Kirk and McCoy exchanged glances.

"Mr. Spock," said the Captain, "report what happened."

The command tone brought Spock sitting upright, albeit more slowly than usual. "Captain," he said, opening his eyes and looking at Kirk, who stood leaning towards him across the table, "I believe we have been contacted by a new sentience."

Kirk drew back slightly and considered. "Telepathically?"

"Yes."

"But you are a touch telepath."

"When the power is so..." Spock hesitated. Kirk got the impression he was about to say overwhelming or overpowering, but instead he finished with, "... so strong."

"I see." Kirk pondered for a moment. "Did they damage you?"

"No."

"Then why did you faint?"

"Faint, Captain? Vulcans do not faint," said Spock, with an arched eyebrow - and promptly fainted again.

Kirk cried out with exasperation. "Bones, we can't have this," he said. "Let's get him to sickbay."

Once again, McCoy stopped him. "No, Jim, let's wait. This is different. Look!"

Spock, in contrast to his earlier trance-like state, was clenching his fists; rapid eye movements could be observed behind his closed eyelids, and he seemed to be in some distress.

McCoy scanned, but before he could even complete his assessment Spock was aware again, snapping back instantly to full consciousness with a suddenness that surprised both men.

"You were saying," Kirk began, "that Vulcans do not faint." Then, casting aside the flippancy that masked his real worry for his friend, he asked, "Are you all right?"

If it was possible Spock for a moment actually looked very slightly sheepish. "Captain..." he began, but seemed unable to continue. Once again he raised his hand to his forehead.

Kirk's concern could no longer be contained. "Spock," he said, "we're taking you to sickbay. Bones, arrange it!" And while McCoy moved to the intercom, Kirk came round the table and sat down next to his First Officer.

Spock shuddered.

"What is it?" Kirk asked. Then, over his shoulder, "Bones, is he in pain?"

Spock replied for him. "No, Captain. It's not that."

"What, then?" Kirk demanded.

"Captain, it's just that..." He seemed loath to continue.

"What?" Kirk almost shouted, actually shaking Spock by the shoulder in frustration. Then, urgently, insistently, "Tell me!"

In the most Human way Kirk had ever seen him behave before, Spock looked up at Kirk with a look of barely controlled anguish and bewilderment on his face and simply said, "Captain, they didn't ask."

There was silence.

"Explain what you mean," Kirk demanded. But strangely enough, it was McCoy who understood first.

"What he means, Jim," he offered, "is that they didn't ask permission to make contact, or approach mental barriers in the usual gentle or courteous way. I'm told telepaths have a method of signalling that they want to communicate. These didn't. They just leapt straight in to his brain and screamed 'HERE WE ARE!'. Is that right, Spock?"

Both the Captain and the doctor knew what distress such a sudden, complete and unexpected invasion of his innermost mind must have caused the Vulcan.

"Doctor," said Spock feebly, "for once I am glad of your preceptive abilities."

"What can we do?" Kirk asked, appalled. "I can't have some alien race jumping in and out of my First Officer's consciousness at will."

"Jim," said McCoy, "the second time..."

Kirk was ahead of him. "The second time was different. You tried to fight them. You had some warning, you were a little more prepared, defensive - that's why it was more traumatic. Did you fight them with any success?"

"Not fight them exactly, Captain," said Spock. "Educate them. Show them that this is not the way contact should be made to a

telepath of my limited ability; or any other, for that matter."

"You mean, teach them some manners," muttered McCoy.

Spock continued despite the interruption. "I did not perceive their intention as harmful. They were simply ignorant of the correct manner in which to proceed."

Kirk turned to Spock. "If this occurs again at any moment, can you resist it? Did you get your message across?"

"I believe I had some measure of success," deduced Spock. "They did, after all, withdraw."

The medical team chose that moment to arrive, but Spock requested that they be asked to wait.

"Captain," he suggested, "I believe that if I go to sickbay now, no purpose will be served. There is no physical barrier to the intensity of the mind probe capabilities these beings display. Further undisciplined contact may occur at any moment, and may be... difficult, particularly if I am unprepared. If you will allow me to withdraw to my quarters and meditate, I should be able to build the strongest mental barriers of which I am capable. Possibly, this would be enough to screen out all but essential information if 'they' should attempt to communicate again."

For Spock this was a long speech. Kirk and McCoy held an unspoken conversation for about ten seconds, after which McCoy sent the medical team back to sickbay and Kirk, rising to his feet, gave a mock bow and said, "Allow me to accompany you to your quarters."

Spock made no protest, and the trio transferred to the Vulcan's rooms.

On arriving at the door Spock turned. "Captain, Doctor," he said, "this process requires intense concentration, therefore I feel it would be best if I were left alone."

"No way!" said Kirk. "How would we know if 'they' contacted you again? They could overwhelm you, and we wouldn't have any way of knowing."

Spock was about to debate this when McCoy interrupted. "I may have a solution," he said. "Do you do this barrier building lying down or sitting up?"

Spock viewed him quizzically. "Sitting up," he said.

"Right," said McCoy. "Wait here. I'll be back in a minute."

It was actually nearer five minutes before he returned. In the meantime Kirk and Spock waited just inside the door of Spock's cabin.

"When you were in contact," Kirk asked, "did you get any indication of where 'they' were? We know they're not on the Enterprise. Did you feel the presence from the planet below, or from space, or maybe from somewhere else?"

Spock turned himself around to face into one of the corners of his room, closed his eyes for a moment, concentrated, then waved a

hand vaguely in a direction behind his left shoulder.

"Over there somewhere," he indicated.

Looking up, he caught Kirk's amused expression. Spock suddenly realised what he had said. He drew himself up to his full height and dignified stance. "I apologise, Captain. I am unable to be more precise."

Kirk, taking pity on Spock's disorientation, assured him he did not need to apologise. Spock suggested that the bridge should be asked to put sensors and security on full alert, searching for any evidence of a deep probe by an unknown force. Kirk complied.

McCoy came back, bringing with him a small transmitter. He pinned it to the sleeve of Spock's tunic. It was the type of transmitter worn by security teams carrying out dangerous assignments out of contact by sight from their colleagues. As long as they remained standing no signal was sent, but if they were injured and lay prone for more than thirty seconds, then the 'prone' signal would activate and those in possession of a receiver could instruct the transporter to snatch them home instantly. In this instance Kirk and Spock retained a receiver and Spock, with a compliment to McCoy's ingenuity, withdrew.

Kirk and McCoy loitered in the corridor outside Spock's cabin. They would have felt silly asking for chairs to be brought. They spent some time leaning against the wall, resting each planet-weary foot in turn, and finally sat on the floor opposite each other. They received a few curious stares from passing crewmembers, who were either too polite or sufficiently circumspect not to enquire as to the purpose of their vigil. Kirk finally ousted one of the junior biochemists from his cabin, which was almost opposite Spock's. With apologies to the curious and rapidly departing young scientist they took up residence in his lounge and kept an eye on Spock's door.

After two hours of no bleeps from the 'prone' transmitter, the eagerly watched door swooshed open and Spock appeared. Even to Kirk's untrained medical eye he looked tired. He leaned slightly against the door frame. Kirk didn't have time for his 'How are you getting on?', or McCoy for his half formed 'Any progress?', because Spock spoke first.

"Doctor," he said, "I am experiencing some difficulty in concentrating. I wonder if I may request some praxomodl?"

McCoy stiffened slightly. Kirk pretended not to notice. McCoy scanned Spock, then apparently making some decision, hesitated only a fraction before administering a hypo.

Spock said, "Thank you," turned, and was gone again.

Kirk looked a question at McCoy.

"What he meant," the doctor informed him, "was that he has a thumping headache. That was a muscle relaxant and painkiller."

They returned to their vigil.

Only forty minutes or so later, Spock emerged and gestured for them to enter. Immediately they perceived that he was more controlled, and a quiet serenity had descended upon him.

"I have been successful, Captain," he reported. "I have developed a barrier which I believe will be of sufficient energy to withstand any further attempts at... interference."

The choice of the word interference brought home to Kirk and McCoy how strongly Spock and his race were repulsed by any forced or involuntary mind contact. It also went a long way towards increasing their understanding of Spock's earlier revulsion and confusion, and made them acutely aware of their friend's discomfort at the intrusion of the unknown species.

"What now?" asked McCoy.

"We wait," said Kirk.

And so they waited.

They waited all through what was left of the ship's night. They waited through breakfast, through the morning, through the mid-day meal and through to early evening again. They sat around Spock's cabin, aware that the hubbub of a busy Starship's day continued around them.

The Enterprise, in geo-stationary orbit, continued to send down investigative teams to collect data on 25796381.

Not exactly doing anything, even though there was a lot they should have been doing, Kirk and McCoy finally succumbed to the Human need for sleep.

Kirk was brought awake by a cramping muscle in his neck, which lay crookedly on the arm of one of Spock's lounge chairs. He became suddenly and guiltily aware that they had both fallen asleep and left their friend to wait alone.

Spock prowled the cabin. He looked tired. Even Vulcans do need sleep, and it was now at least forty-one hours since they had all set out together to explore the planet's surface.

"Spock," Kirk said quietly, "are you all right? We should have stayed awake. I'm sorry."

The Vulcan came to a halt before Kirk. "There is no need to apologise, Jim. Your need is greater than mine. However, although I am quite well at the moment, I may soon require rest myself. The last day has been somewhat strenuous."

Kirk looked at him more closely. Things must be getting bad if Spock could make such an admission. Kirk knew he was not asking for sympathy; he was simply reporting a fact. Yet Spock was logical enough to ask for help if he really needed it. It was clear that maintaining such a strong mental barrier was taking its toll. It became evident that something else was disturbing Spock. Vulcans do not naturally prowl with impatience.

"Something disturbs you."

It was a statement rather than a question. Spock sat down.

"Captain, I may have taught them too well."

Kirk made as if to ask a question, but then thought better of it and waved to the Vulcan to continue.

"Over the last hour I believe I have been perceiving 'their' presence. They are waiting. I think I have made clear to them that undisciplined contact is unwelcome and may be dangerous. They understand. I sense a caution, yet a growing, urgent need to break the silence, to speak. Captain," he finished, "I now think it was a mistake to wait so long. I believe I should attempt to initiate a contact."

Kirk considered the danger. "Are you sure?" he asked. But Spock was adamant.

Kirk woke McCoy and after some discussion they decided to proceed. Spock was, after all, the best judge of the alien's intentions, as he was the only one who had had any contact.

Kirk and McCoy took their seats opposite Spock, who indicated that he was ready to begin.

He was almost instantly rewarded with a successful contact. As before, communication was short and swift. This time, however, there was no trauma as Spock was prepared and the 'others' were gentle. They broke contact very quickly.

Spock immediately gave Kirk the location of the planet of the aliens, together with the distance at which they could be found. He even paused to give Kirk the course they should lay in to reach it, and suggested that speed was required.

Kirk instructed the helm to lay in the new course and go to maximum warp. "It could be a trap," he cautioned out loud, but Spock reassured him.

"Captain, they believe they are in genuine distress. We must go to their aid as swiftly as possible."

Spock slipped back into a trance, and so it continued. He would be 'away' for a few moments and then return to consciousness. Each time he gave them more information.

After the second or third time McCoy asked why the aliens didn't just send all the information at once.

"They are extremely powerful, Doctor. I would be unable to withstand a prolonged contact. Even when they are reducing their output to a minimum a brief encounter is enough. A respite enables me to recuperate somewhat, and assimilate more information successfully." And with that he was back in trance again.

The information gradually emerged.

"We are wrong to speak of 'them'. Rather we should say 'it', for it is a single being. It does, however, have a multifaceted personality - or perhaps it is a colony with a single mind."

And later, "This does not make sense, but I receive strong impressions of *melting*."

And later still, "It is very ancient, Captain. Its concept of



history and time is vast and incompatible to ours. If I were more able, there would be much we could learn."

After this last pronouncement Spock slipped into one more trance, longer than the others, but when he came out of it he was silent and sat very still. Finally he took a deep breath, and McCoy could see that his hands were trembling.

"That's enough, Jim," he said. "He's exhausted."

"Spock?" queried Kirk quietly.

"Do not concern yourselves, Doctor, Captain," Spock said. "Contact has finished for now. It perceives that I am weary. We have agreed to speak again when we reach its location."

The Enterprise sped through the darkness. Kirk, on the bridge, monitored their progress. In his pocket the 'prone' transmitter, turned down to its most muted setting, bleeped quietly away to itself, reassuring him that Spock had kept his promise and gone to sleep.

Kirk and McCoy, after settling him, had had a conference in the doctor's office. They had agreed that Spock appeared to be in no particular danger and that they would reserve any further judgement until they had identified the alien and its problem.

"Location given by Mr. Spock now coming within sensor range, Captain," reported Mr. Sulu.

"Maximum magnification," ordered Kirk.

The viewscreen showed a distant solar system.

"Three planets," said Sulu. "The outermost is the one the coordinates would indicate. Captain, sensors show the sun gradually overheating. It will go nova."

"When?" demanded Kirk urgently.

"About..." Sulu grinned, "three years, sir."

Kirk relaxed. "No need to turn and run then, is there, Mr. Sulu? Head straight for that planet and put us in orbit. Mr. Chekov, sensors fully active; we must locate that life form."

As the image on the viewscreen became gradually larger and clearer, the bridge crew drew towards it, gazing with delight and amazement. Kirk, too, found his gaze drawn, for the third planet, despite its size (about twice that of Earth's moon) appeared completely and clearly transparent. Like a giant jewel it sparkled where the light from its sun and other stars refracted through it and reflected from it. It was so clear it was possible to see right through.

The crew, as the Enterprise switched to a polar orbit, were treated to a display of all the colours of the spectrum, for in its depths the planet acted as a prism. The surface appeared smooth and polished, and was completely unmarked and featureless.

"Sensors?" asked Kirk, consciously turning his attention from

the beauty of the crystal sphere.

"Silica, mostly," reported Chekov, hunched over the Science Officer's station. "Some hydrogen and oxygen. No known life readings."

Well, Kirk thought to himself, *wherever Spock's alien is, it's not on the surface of that planet. We'd see it from miles off. There's nothing there at all.*

Four things happened at once: Chekov, at the sensors, said, "Sir!" urgently; the air went dead again; the planet pulsed in a myriad of brilliant hues; and the transmitter in Kirk's pocket stopped bleeping.

Spock was awake. No! Spock had been awakened.

It was later Kirk's belief that the realisation dawned on them all at about the same time. A million thoughts seemed to sweep through his brain all at once.

*The alien is not ON the planet, he thought, the alien IS the planet! An enormous, sentient globe. Silica, Chekov said. That's glass. And oxygen, hydrogen - that's water. A mixture of ice and glass. And alive. A whole planet, alive! And in trouble. Its sun is going nova, it will get hotter and hotter. It will melt. Maybe it's already melting. That's why it needs help. Three years, Sulu said. A long time for us, but for a planet? A very ancient being, as Spock told us. Three years is nothing. We have discovered the first ever sentient planet, a telepathic planet. How do I speak to a planet? What do I say to a planet? Stop thinking of it as a planet,* he chided himself. *It's alive, just like you are. And now we know that the Horta is not the only silica-based life form in the universe. His thoughts whirled.*

Spock arrived at his side. "Yes, Captain," he said. "I believe you understand. Space is vast. We are the first to pass this way. The first hope it has of any help."

"But what can we do?" Kirk asked. "The sun is going nova."

"Not for three years," Spock reminded him.

"Conference," Kirk decided. "Briefing room."

A first contact is always exciting. Kirk informed Starfleet and was instructed to offer 'Crystal', as everyone had started to call the planet, Federation membership.

After much discussion, during which members of the Science and Engineering sections offered suggestions ranging from teaching Crystal to teleport, to creating an artificial sun, they had to admit there was nothing immediate they could do about the problem themselves. It was simply beyond the power of a single Starship. They would have to hand it over to the experts.

Spock and Scott were hopeful. They believed that given the unique nature of the discovery, Starfleet would not wish to lose an opportunity to study the phenomenon. They were sure that the pooled, massive resources of Starfleet could provide a solution.

Scott felt that the most likely answer would be to bring in some of Starfleet's massive construction equipment, which was used for towing anything up to and including meteorites across space. Provided that a new orbit could be found around another star, which did not disrupt that solar system, it was not beyond the realms of possibility that Crystal could be found a new home.

To Kirk fell the honour of offering Crystal Federation membership. Spock suggested it.

"But how?" demanded Kirk. "I'm not a telepath."

"If you would permit the intrusion," Spock suggested, "I could act as interpreter."

They settled into Kirk's cabin. McCoy came along too, "Just to be sure," he said.

Spock slipped easily into a trance. Reaching out, he placed a hand on Kirk's temple.

"My mind to your mind..."

Kirk became aware of an enormous pressure. A vastness almost overwhelmed him. He was aware of a strength and complexity that was barely controlled by the filter of Spock's mind. Kirk knew how it felt to be transparent. He sensed danger, and the joy of a new sentence to communicate with for the first time.

Tentatively, he struck up a conversation. He offered friendship, trust, and the resources of the Federation. They were accepted.

He explained that Starfleet would send a trained telepath and a fleet of construction ships, to communicate and to try and help. There were difficulties. How could a being who had no legs, arms, head, or even body as they understood it comprehend the use of tools? Yet the concern, their willingness to help, was recognised and accepted.

Kirk sensed Spock's barrier waver, through the pressure of protecting the two minds. Too much power began to surge through Kirk's brain. He rapidly made his farewells, and with a sadness all three felt, the link was broken.

Kirk reeled back against the wall. Spock and McCoy were concerned, but he assured them he felt wonderful. He couldn't stop grinning.

McCoy looked at the two of them. Yes, he thought, *they're happy. This really IS what it's all about.*



# BRIEF ENCOUNTER

by

Linda Bryant

Spock sat deliberately still in the command chair on the darkened bridge of the Enterprise. In another 1.482 hours the artificial day would increase the lighting levels and the emotional atmosphere.

Cautiously, Spock lowered his barriers. Always he had to shield carefully the Human adrenal withdrawal phase, which Dr. McCoy so expressively described as post-action depression.

Spock was fatigued. Scott and Uhura had returned to the bridge after four hours rest, but he had carried on, using the link he had initiated as an emergency measure to protect Kirk to keep him asleep and ensure a much-needed rest.

For a moment Spock tested the echo, fast fading now, of that link, allowing himself the joy of feeling Kirk's mind in his. He hugged the sensation, storing every facet in his memory.

Spock shielded his thoughts, carefully schooling his face to impassivity as he considered the children who had become enslaved; but somehow, in the rituals of childhood, their minds had remained relatively untouched, and had had the flexibility to resist the complete domination of the Gorgon. Their parents had resisted - and died.

He considered the effects on the younger, more flexible minds. Somehow the rituals, the seemingly meaningless chants, had held the children's minds from harm, and together the children had had the resilience to defeat the tyranny of the Gorgon.

It had always been a source of amazement to him that Humans developed a personality which could be changed by experience, training, or their will, allowing a certain moulding, but that the limits of that flexibility were the limits of the genetic personality. Kirk's was the most flexible he had encountered, and his acceptance of his Vulcan mindset was frightening. Kirk was so confident, so innocently trusting, that Spock found the contact at once enticing and repulsive, the set of Kirk's mind like that of a child.

Vulcan children lost that untouched feel with the formation of the parental bond; the bonding at Kas Wan, when a child accepted his telepathic nature and his need for contact with other minds, imposed maturity and completed him. Except for himself, a hybrid for whom the bonding had been only an intrusion. His instinctive resistance was an assertion of the strength of his Human nature, and marked him as a telepath who would not be able to accept a constant mind contact.

An impatient exclamation from Uhura as she made a decision, got up and walked over to Scott, brought Spock's attention back. Idly he listened to their conversation. For the last 15.426 minutes he had expected either Uhura (62.225% probability) or Scott (37.775%) to initiate that Human displacement activity and go and get a tray of

refreshments.

Uhura approached him and reached out, touching his sleeve. Curious, Spock allowed the touch, accepting the transmitted emotions - sadness, a desperate hope, and a need to express caring... to him? Spock's acceptance was reflected in his relaxed expression. Uhura's mouth trembled into a responsive smile as she let go of him, handed him his tea, and with her now free hand wiped at her tears. Spock stilled, staring into his tea as he belatedly recognised his memory of that feeling.

Amanda.

Scott, his cup in hand, wandered too casually over to the con and remarked very quietly, "Thank ye, laddie. I wasna' sure you'd accept the mothering." He continued more loudly, his speech growing faster with his emotions, "Leonard says parenthood is the extreme act of optimism."

Spock's eyebrow rose at the logic of the doctor's illogic. He thought of the parents of Charlie X, of the parents of the children in sickbay, and then of his own parents. In a reflexive action he grasped desperately at the link with Kirk. Alone. He was alone, the link with Kirk dissipated. There were logical reasons for that link, but he would have to meditate on his own reaction.

To his surprise, Scott had not moved, but stood watching him. Spock was uneasy, aware that the engineer saw more deeply than he outwardly let show. Scott nodded to him and grasped his shoulder as he turned away to hide his emotion, while his touch shot it into Spock. "Thank ye, Mr. Spock, sir."

Uhura was singing quietly to herself. Spock froze. In the midst of accepting the complex emotions, Human and Vulcan, he was jolted to the core of his being. Uhura was singing an old filksong, 'There's no place on a Starship for children'. A career in space is not conducive to parenthood, and each of them had tacitly given up that right. It was the sadness inherent in not having a child, the sadness of a being who would exist only in the fabric of the universe for all eternity.

Spock shivered, scared at the intensity of the feedback from his own mind. His thoughts meshed in - hybrid, sterile, alone beyond eternity.

Control. He must control. The stars on the viewscreen blurred. Spock blinked and consciously relaxed his hands. He blinked again as the bridge adapted to daylight mode.

Spock stood and walked to the science station. The turbolift arrived and Kirk, Chekov and Sulu came on duty. Kirk bounded over and stood looking out at the starfield. The atmosphere seemed lighter, brighter.

Kirk came over and, leaning close, asked him to estimate their arrival time at Starbase. With the return of normality Spock's confidence increased and, basking in the Captain's aura of well-being, Spock responded.

Kirk watched him intently, but could read nothing in Spock's calm face; he made a mental note to insist that Spock get some rest as soon as they reached Starbase.

It was very quiet on the bridge of the Enterprise. The mission was over, but the tension shared by the crew left in its wake a crew finely tuned, poised on that edge of extreme acuity which comes with a catharsis.

With Kirk in the command chair, Spock settled to his station and a sensor scan. Uhura searched the range of her communications console. With an abrupt movement Spock re-ran a phase on the sensors. Uhura responded by recalibrating into the area Spock was interested in. Neither had needed verbal communication, and Uhura had automatically relayed their findings to the other stations.

"Contact bearing 108.5216, range 1.002 light years," Spock announced.

Kirk was intent. "Slow to impulse, Mr. Scott. Bring her round gently, Mr. Sulu, please. Uhura, sound yellow alert."

"Small object, 89.922 probability that it is a space vehicle," Spock reported.

Kirk did some elementary calculations. "Congratulations, Mr. Spock."

On cue, Spock's eyebrow rose, asking his question.

"You've found the proverbial needle in the haystack."

Spock's eyebrows disappeared into his hairline as he inclined his head, acknowledging his appreciation of his Captain's use of idiom, but he would not be drawn into asking why he should search for a small metal rod in a mass of dead and dehydrating vegetation.

"Aye, ye've the right of it, Captain," chuckled Mr. Scott.

"Let's see what we've got. Magnification x 20 on screen please."

The small ship showed up as a rhomboid shape.

"Computer has no match. Configuration of the vessel is unknown to the Federation."

Sulu selected dual control of the helm, absorbing the computer approach but ready to over-ride with manual control. Captain Kirk's standing orders insisted on a manual over-ride in all but routine operations, for in space the unknown is met and a Human brain can act faster than it can reprogramme a computer. Sulu was intent on the approach.

"Gently," Kirk murmured, to the bridge crew in general or to the Enterprise herself.

Scott slowed the Enterprise as she came to the small vessel. Spock was working with Vulcan intensity at the science station.

The turbolift hissed and deposited McCoy on the bridge. His experienced eyes immediately picked out the vessel in the illuminated field. McCoy bounded towards the command chair.

"How did we find that?" He was awed; to find a ship that size

from warp speed was impossible - or nearly impossible, he mentally corrected.

"Spock?" Kirk prompted.

"Doctor, with our magnetic abnormality sensors..."

"Spock!" Kirk was uneasy - first Spock had passed over a good tension-easing chance to pretend to misunderstand an old Human idiom and tease in the established routine, and now he was giving a 'Vulcan' answer to a rhetorical question, almost as if he was so intent and withdrawn into the security of his work that he hadn't noticed. Was Spock badly fatigued? Just what was he hiding behind his Supervulcan facade?

Spock raised his head from the viewer and answered his prompting smoothly, and Kirk wondered if he had imagined the pause.

"Captain, it is a vessel, propulsion unit matter-antimatter, core design, operating at low level. No apparent life forms, sensors or navigational aids. Sensors have registered very small power fluctuations, which may be in response to our approach, or may be inherent in this unit. I am unable to determine if this is a self-contained vessel or a part of a vessel."

As he was talking Spock had been selecting information from the computer and feeding it to the navigational console. Chekov was working to refine the image.

"On visual now," Spock announced, and Chekov fed the images to the main screen.

McCoy read the figures for pressure and life support. "No life on that, Captain, unless they are in suspended animation."

"No life as we know it, Doctor," Spock corrected, just too quickly.

"You speculating, Spock?" McCoy asked him, head tilted in unconscious imitation. "Don't you want to accept a barren ship either?" he suggested softly, for Vulcan ears only.

Momentarily Spock blocked all his responses. How could McCoy have known? Why did he choose those words?

Kirk was prepared to be amused by their familiar banter when he sensed a discordant response. Both Spock and McCoy covered instantly, but he realised there was something he would need to probe.

Smoothly he turned attention away from them to Uhura. "Uhura?"

"No response on any frequency, Captain. They do not seem to know we are here."

Kirk's intuition was working on overdrive. Why were they all so determined that this was more than a complex propulsion unit jettisoned by some alien spacefarer as its fuel ran out? He re-read the core figures. The power had not run out. The hull was a double skin, fully spaceworthy. The core area, which housed a matter/antimatter propulsion unit, filled about 60% of the ship. Hexagonal tunnels ran the length of the ship, two long ones beneath the core and two short ones above, giving the ship a bilateral

symmetry. The tunnels met at one end of the core, forming a central bridge area. Between the tunnels and the hull skins were defined area of variable size, based on multiples; was this a predetermined, probably fabricated design?

Kirk watched the figures and schematics define as the Enterprise completed the exploratory probe sequences. Construction materials and methods based on silicon, in line with matter/antimatter propulsion; hexagonal configuration repeated. Kirk felt he was missing something. No sensor capacity shown; the energy pulses reached the skin of the vessel via lines in the tunnels, and stopped at the ceramic hull plates.

"Captain, the energy pulse patterns may be in response to us, or may be predetermined by the nature of the core. I am unable to match with any known constants."

"Language computer has no match for any combination of the signal pulse," Uhura reported.

"Mr. Scott, Mr. Sulu, let's take a closer run, but abort if necessary." Kirk looked from one officer to the other. "Be prepared to get us out of here - fast."

The Enterprise edged into a closer orbit. The bridge crew concentrated on monitoring the sensor systems. Spock stiffened, then slumped momentarily over his sensors, but his reaction went unnoticed as Kirk's gasp of amazement drew the Humans' attention to the viewscreen. The alien vessel had started a slow spin.

"Steady," Kirk breathed.

Obediently the vessel slowed. It spun on its central axis, allowing the Enterprise's sensors to scan it and build a picture of it.

Kirk knew the vessel had not responded to his words, but the feeling that somehow it or the beings it carried were aware of them and responding to them persisted. He rechecked the readings. Though low, the internal atmosphere was closed to space; the vessel was spaceworthy, and the constant fluctuations in energy and colour on its skin seemed to form almost subliminally an elusive pattern.

Kirk looked round the bridge and made his decision. "Spock, tie in all communications, lingua and science banks to the exploratory probe unit. Mr. Scott, you have the con. Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, let's take a shuttle and go visiting." He glanced at McCoy. "Three sets of life support modules and," with a look at Chekov, "the EPU. Report to the hangar deck in 15 minutes."

As they entered the turbolift Chekov was ordering the exploratory probe unit to be transferred to the Galileo, and Scott was ordering linkup and standby on the hangar deck.

Twenty minutes later the Galileo launched from the shuttle bay, Kirk at the controls, Spock as co-pilot. Dr. McCoy stood between them on the short journey to the alien craft.

Spock moved back to the EPU and activated its sensor systems. McCoy sank into the co-pilot's seat and watched as Kirk took the Galileo in a wide arc round the alien vessel. He appreciated the



need to look it over. It was not necessary, for more detailed information from the sensors was on record, but it did bring the ship into Human perspective to see it with your own eyes. McCoy mused that this willingness to accept and translate what he was doing into proportion, to cement Human and machine perceptions, was what made Kirk such an excellent commander. McCoy idly wished for the nth time that he could see things as the Vulcan saw them. The circle completed as McCoy scanned the alien ship, wondering on the perceptions of the builders and what they were doing in space.

Kirk manoeuvred the shuttle alongside the vessel. Spock got out a fly line and went into the airlock. He activated his suit and opened the outer hatch. Carefully he aimed and fired. The suction cap of the safety line caught and adhered to the plates of the alien ship just above the hexagonal plate which sensors had defined as a hatch. Spock clipped his safety harness onto the line and let the suit motors take him to the hatch. He took a tricorder reading and depth profile of the hatch area.

Kirk and McCoy watched on the screen. It was amazing that the methods of entry and exit of almost any species were so similar. Perhaps, mused McCoy, everything was simply a response to Occam's Razor.

Kirk's voice interrupted his thoughts. "Hold the handle and turn, Spock."

Spock, naturally more cautious, fitted a multi-purpose power tool into the two hexagonal depressions on the edge of the plate. He had automatically noted that the mechanism worked clockwise; a rough and ready empirical rule categorised this vessel as coming from a right hand spiral galaxy. The hatch opened, the slight internal pressure pushing it open. Spock checked again with his tricorder.

"Send the EPU over, Captain, and I'll take it in with me."

Kirk thought for a moment. With the vessel's hatch opened the inner docking area could be seen as a part of the corridor with a second hatch - a typical airlock working. The problem was that the dimensions were barely adequate to take the suited Vulcan and the EPU, but Spock would not miscalculate. Kirk picked up the EPU.

"Bones, I'm going across now. Set up backup systems, tie in with the Enterprise and then come over too. Spock, I'm coming over with the EPU."

Kirk halted a scant metre from Spock and passed the EPU to him. Awkwardly, but with a long-practised movement, they transferred and activated the unit. Kirk pushed Spock into the hatch. A hand on his shoulder and a quick, "Good luck", then Kirk shut the hatch. Working as a team they checked the seal on the outer hatch, then Spock opened the inner door, the docking area pressurising from the corridor.

Spock frowned, then relaxed as his tricorder registered energy readings as the vessel's systems compensated for the slight loss of pressure into the docking area.

"Vessel's life support functional, Captain."

"Right. I'm coming in, Spock."

Impulsive and irresponsible. Spock caught his uncontrolled thought, aware on the edge of perception that something was wrong.

He examined his memory, searching for the elusive impression, then he clamped down his mind shields. For a moment it had seemed that his shields had shivered, as if every level of his mind had been disrupted. Spock belatedly recognised the symptom of a twitch, a sort of mental yawn - he was extremely fatigued, and would need to ask McCoy for a stim shot.

The hatch opened behind him. Spock jumped, bumping the edges of his life support suit on the angles of the corridor as he turned to face Kirk.

"Damn!" Kirk's hand was pushing at the catch.

"Captain?" Spock enquired anxiously.

Kirk fiddled with the seal, then opened it. Dr. McCoy stepped through, clumsy in his suit. He pushed by Kirk and turned Spock to him, waving a hypo.

"You crazy Vulcan. When will you learn that you're not indestructible?" In a softer tone he continued, nodding at the hypo, still holding the Vulcan up, "You nearly passed out on us then, falling asleep on your feet," he grumbled.

"Really, Doctor? You know it is not possible even for Vulcans to sleep standing up."

Under cover of their banter question and answer had been given. Deftly McCoy administered a stim shot to Spock. Softly, so as not to be overheard by Kirk, McCoy gave Spock a limit of two hours. Spock's Human make-up allowed him to accept a stim shot, but his withdrawal was sudden and debilitating.

Kirk was ready and anxious to explore. Spock took the tricorder back and indicated forwards, allowing Kirk to lead.

*Hell, I hope that shot holds him,* thought McCoy, following on hands and knees up the cramped tunnel. He became aware of regular and uncomfortable protrusions from the floor, and automatically checked if they were repeated on the other five sides of the hexagon. They were not. Some orientation, an empirical indicator of a gravitational planet of origin, or the track of some robotic system? McCoy's imagination immediately thought of a robot machine as big as the circumference of the tunnel bearing down on him. *Incipient claustrophobia,* he diagnosed. Well, it was a more elegant description than plain scared!

Bumping inelegantly into Spock he got the message and backed off, allowing the others space to move into a junction area. McCoy dropped a metre or so across the junction into the 'control' area of the ship.

The structure, remembered from the computer visuals, was impressive. Two short hexagonal tunnels led up and forwards, while a tunnel identical to the one they had come from led down and back on the other side of the propulsion core. The blank sides held what seemed to be control consoles.

Typically, Kirk had moved into the centre of the area and was turning in a slow circle, absorbing all he could see. Spock had been drawn like a magnet to one of the control consoles, and was intent on his tricorder. The EPU had responded to control from the Enterprise and was connected to one of the consoles. Scott's voice filtered in,

discussing with Spock some of the fluctuating power readings.

McCoy leaned his back on one of the consoles and watched them work. He was a doctor, a student of life, not of command or science. *Yet here we stand, he thought, the soldier, the mystic and the healer - the triumvirate of life standing concerned over a dead vessel.*

Suddenly the deck beneath him quivered, and he was aware of a scream, a denial, and the dissolution of himself as the transporter beam took him.

Scott looked at the scene on the transporter pads, frozen into a moment's immobility. Like sleepers awakening, the three officers opened their eyes and removed the life support suits. McCoy turned to check Kirk, and was reassured to hear the Captain's command tones.

"Explanation, Mr. Scott?"

Chekov's voice filtered through. "The vessel's computers took command of the EPU and drained the transtater units into its primary circuits, and it just winked out of space."

"Continue all sensor scans..." Kirk's voice trailed off. As he had been speaking his eyes had searched for Spock. The Vulcan had collapsed on the platform and McCoy was bent over him.

Kirk cut the channel to the bridge. "Bones?"

McCoy looked up. "Jim, I had to give him a stim shot over there. You know what they do to his hybrid physiology."

Kirk was not sure, but knowing how Spock avoided a stim shot unless it was essential, and was always very quiet and withdrawn for days after, he gathered that the after-effects, even if suffered in silence, were not very pleasant.

"I'm sorry. Do what you can for him. Call me on the bridge."

Kirk took Scott with him and they left the transporter room.

McCoy motioned to the medical team Scott had called to load Spock onto the trolley. For the moment he was unconscious. All McCoy knew, from scanner readings and what little Spock would say, was that the Vulcan suffered the normal depression, but he suspected that the enforced loss of control was the symptom most disliked. All he usually did was give in to Spock's request to be left alone in his quarters until it passed.

McCoy looked round the briefing room. For two days Spock had been holed up in his room. This morning he had come to sickbay declaring himself functional, requesting a return to duty and to attend the mission report session.

True to his word, McCoy hadn't used his scanners on Spock, but he didn't need to. Spock was far from recovered, but wanted the reassurance of duty. In twelve hours the Enterprise would dock at Starbase, and he had promised to rest then.

McCoy split his concentration between the mission report and the officers. Suddenly his attention was caught. Kirk explained how he had resisted the Gorgon, but was losing when he was pulled from the bridge. The pressure lessened in the shielding of the turbolift.

A part of McCoy registered the taut posture as Kirk calmly spoke of a meld enabling him to see the illusion, and how he and Spock broke the thrall. Once again McCoy marvelled at the emotional openness of the Captain, until he realised how this hurt the very private Vulcan.

*Doesn't he know what he's doing?* McCoy was astonished to hear Spock speak, apologising for only being able to protect one other. Could Kirk not see how close Spock was to breaking? The Vulcan's knuckles whitened as he clenched his fingers.

The computer voice went through the log, putting all their observations into a single report. It concluded with McCoy's recommendations for the children.

Kirk looked at his chronometer. McCoy considered asking for a rest break, then decided that it might just prolong the agony for Spock. He racked his brains for plans for clearing the briefing room should it be necessary. He checked Spock. The Vulcan seemed to have settled down, and looked more absorbed in the proceedings, intent on the schematics for the alien vessel, augmented and corrected with data from the EPU. Kirk and Scott too were intent.

McCoy was aware that in his 'worst scenario' musings he had missed something. He felt annoyed - that green-blooded, pointy-eared elf always caught him wrong-footed. In the time he had just spent planning a strategic support Spock appeared to have recovered his usual equilibrium.

Kirk, Spock, Scott and Chekov were all leaning forward, intent on the small screen. Anyone would think that screen held the Secret of the Universe, or at least a new life form. The silence stretched on as first Kirk's impression of the vessel came over, finishing with his conviction of a presence. Then his own description of those final moments - of the deck quivering, of his impression of a scream of agony, of his fleeting impression of a life form.

Then, in quiet, even, Vulcan tones, Spock describing the sensations of a telepathic touch, first on the bridge as he stared at the patterns of light on the vessel from the Enterprise. Of his barriers being thoroughly breached, then restored, in the first minutes aboard the ship. The stim shot had heightened his sensitivity, and he had been drawn to the core of the vessel - faintly, gently enticed by a telepathic presence drawing him to it. An impression of infinite sadness, of acceptance that the entropy that supported life was dissipating, and that the dissipation would result in death.

The EPU had found the mechanical fault; Spock's mind had provided the guidance to repair it. Spock had been certain it was too late. Not even Vulcan memory could ascertain what had happened. As the radiation flowed from the transtator there was a pulse of telepathic power so great that it seared into Kirk, McCoy and himself as his mind grappled and could not mesh with the alien.

The EPU sensors had registered the physiological effect and the emergency circuits had activated and beamed them to the Enterprise.

In the absolute quiet of complete attention the computer played back Spock's conclusion. The alien was a gestalt, a complex of minds, a force greater than he could accommodate. He channelled all he could from individual crystal to active core; those individuals he could not channel, died. About 80% of the alien died, not in peaceful acceptance but in a desperate rush for life.

The computer cut to visual as the part of the alien that lived took the vessel out of their space, its lights weaving a pattern as yet indecipherable. The computer cut to Chekov's report, unheeded.

Typically, it was Kirk who responded. He moved round the table and grabbed Spock, swinging the Vulcan to him.

"We did it!" Don't you see, it lived, it's got a chance to get home."

Something in the Vulcan's attitude reached through. Forgetting he was touching Spock, and therefore forcing his emotion on him, Kirk spoke directly to Spock, his voice high with emotion.

"Spock, anyone who goes out into space knows the risks. That some will return because we were there is a bonus."

The Vulcan found his voice. "Jim, 80% died - because of me, they died."

"No, Spock."

McCoy found tears in his eyes at the deep compassion in Kirk's voice.

"Spock, you are still affected by that stim shot. Believe me, my friend, it's a matter of rejoicing that in a first encounter rescue we have kept a life form in the galaxy. Logically, 20% is more acceptable than none, and equally logically we cannot change our nature any more than they could change theirs." Somehow Kirk managed a smile that was almost a grimace. Abruptly he pushed Spock away. "Meditate on it, my friend. Bones, see he has rest."

Kirk wiped at his eyes and left the room, taking the bridge crew with him and leaving the emotionally charged atmosphere.

*So much for emotional openness*, thought McCoy, recognising Kirk's withdrawal into command.

It was the most courageous act of McCoy's life to turn and go to Spock. Softly he walked back to stand behind the Vulcan. He saw the trembling increase, and knew he was traumatising Spock further.

*Well*, he said to himself, *you've always wondered with puerile curiosity what it would be like if Spock did break, and now you don't really want to know.*

Berating himself for being a coward, he concentrated on Spock. What he was experiencing didn't really matter - he could deal with it later. As always when he concentrated wholly on someone else, he retreated inwards and let intuition take over. Human intuition. What use was that to a Vulcan? Spock's distress was like an aura. McCoy smelt the heat and scent of Spock, and felt the vibration of his shudders. Willing Spock to accept him, McCoy sat on the edge of the table, imposing his presence on Spock's personal space.

Spock fought for control, his whole body rigid. As Spock held his breath and tensed McCoy moved, one hand touching Spock's shoulder, the other grasping Spock's hands. Projecting a calm acceptance, a protective caring, McCoy let his barriers drop. His fingers trembled in resonance with Spock's as he willed the Vulcan to accept his help. He felt his own eyes filming over and made no attempt to stop the tears. He felt a hot breath, a sigh, then a hot wetness seep over his fingers. Gently McCoy prised Spock's hands from his face. Blindly, trustingly, Spock lifted his face, his eyes squeezed fiercely shut on the betraying tears.

McCoy could not face that vulnerability and pulled Spock to him. Unfocused, the Vulcan allowed McCoy to pull him towards him. The velour on McCoy's shoulder was strangely comforting, sensual, and McCoy felt solid and cool to his overloaded senses. McCoy's heartbeat was strong and regular, and provided a link to normality.

McCoy reeled under Spock's weight and nearly panicked, feeling the heat and the hurt as he cradled Spock to him. *Neither you nor I are any good at this, Spock.* Compassion took over and he settled Spock's weight more naturally, holding his head against him.

McCoy felt the tips of his fingers burn where he touched Spock's damp cheekbone, and let his fingers trail into the damp hair. *Give in, Spock - go on, give in. Let go. Go on, let go. Cry, damn you, cry!*

Frantically McCoy rocked Spock to him, feeling the Vulcan's shudders shake him. His mind totally detached, McCoy found that he was rocking them both. For long moments he continued, and knew that he had been in some way too successful; he had allowed Spock time and comfort enough to regain some control.

Gently he loosened his hold and looked down. Spock was asleep. McCoy let him slip to rest awkwardly on the table. He moved his cramped shoulder, aware that the hot dampness was more his own sweat than Spock's tears. The healer in him mourned - if only Spock could have achieved the healing of tears. He stood looking down at the being sleeping on the table.

The door swished open. McCoy did not look up, unwilling to meet the eyes of James T. Kirk.

Spock stirred and lifted his head, apparently unconcerned at showing his ravaged face to his friends. McCoy felt deep inner amusement at himself; to be ashamed of what had happened was not logical or necessary when Spock had shown his acceptance of his friends. McCoy felt honoured.

"Spock, how are you?"

Spock took a moment to evaluate his condition. "Both dehydrated, and in need of the facilities." An uncomfortable look crossed his face as he straightened, got up and walked slightly stiff-legged to the door. "In reverse order."

Kirk and McCoy gave in to their amusement as they followed him from the briefing room.



# THE RELUCTANT FAN

How humiliating for a so-called intellectual  
 To find one's education has been wholly ineffectual  
 I thought I was quite different from the mass of womankind  
 More serious more logical my tastes much more refined  
 Yet shamefully I find myself - it's something of a shock -  
 Down on my knees with all the rest

Adoring Mr. Spock  
 (Sure is an odd feeling)

What *is* this weird phenomenon what *is* the explanation  
 How can a fictional alien exert such fascination  
 Is it the ice-clear brain more like it's the emotional tension  
 Or maybe those strange features it's more tactful not to mention  
 Cool as a Vulcan cucumber, reliable as a rock  
 And just about as yielding -

What *do* we see in Spock?  
 (We're probably wasting our time, girls)

Why is it him we dream of forgetting all the others  
 Who form the good ship Enterprise's gallant band of brothers  
 Refusing to be side-tracked by its glories technological  
 Our fancy's only caught and held by charm that's biological  
 Not even the handsome Captain or that blue-eyed sweetie 'Doc'  
 Has got a hope in Hades of outgunning Mr. Spock  
 (no, not even Sulu.)

When Starfleet sends its vessel on a mission interplanetary  
 With secret orders seeming more than usually non-explanatory  
 We know some members of the crew will have to be expendable  
 And firmly fix our hopes on those who are the most dependable  
 The Captain and the Engineer, the Bridge party en bloc -  
 But most of all we keep our fingers tightly crossed for Spock  
 (so far and in spite of everything it's working)

I'm sure that Mr. Nimoy has got his own opinion  
 As to the hidden nature of this character's dominion  
 To claim that all we Trekkies with our Vulcan-haunted eyes  
 Are his responsibility might give him a surprise  
 But sure they fit together like a key into a lock  
 The actor's own persona and the soul of Mr. Spock  
 (ipse dixit)

Who was it breathed the life into this creature whose potential  
 Quite unexplored unrealised was deemed inconsequential  
 Who gave him movement face and voice and made us all aware  
 That Earth is short of something when a Vulcan isn't there  
 Some folk there are who say it's wrong it's just a wicked mock  
 To tease us all with non-existent characters like Spock  
 ('I, Captain? Non-existent? I think, do I not?')

I wouldn't want to take a line so ultra-Puritanical  
 I'd hate to see your show replaced by one merely mechanical  
 If you will only send us a few more of your spectaculars -  
 Another 'Star Trek' series would be hailed as quite miraculous -  
 We'll all go plunging in again like mermaids off a rock

Down into that dark ocean  
 Of feminine emotion  
 Continually in motion  
 And thrown into commotion  
 By the all-too-common notion  
 That with great enough devotion  
 And perhaps some magic potion  
 Elixir or lotion  
 (but only as a last resort of course)  
 We might achieve promotion  
 To the arms of Mr. Spock

Kirk: Plot a course for Vulcan immediately, Mr. Chekov - Warp  
 Eight, Mr. Scott, *if* you please. This is for  
 your own good, Spock...

Spock: Indeed, Captain, were I capable of emotion, I might  
 confess to a slight sensation of relief...

McCoy: Frightened, Spock?

Spock: No, Doctor, but I have a low boredom threshold, as I  
 believe you Humans call it, and prefer logical  
 forms of activity...

McCoy: Well, you could have fooled me, Spock!

Chekov: Keptin! There is a Klingon warship out there! It's  
 just opened fire!

Kirk: Ah! Now at last I shall have some peace on this bridge!  
 And please, Mr. Sulu, as I would like that  
 peace to last a while, *don't* get him with your  
 first salvo!

Pac Deacon

## AMANDA TO SAREK

Surface gleam of chilly silver  
 Hides the purest gold  
 Dark reflections hold a spark of  
 Something not entirely cold

Grace in movement here redeems  
 Severity of line  
 Icy surface though it seems  
 Underneath what burns is mine

Pac Deacon



# GLIMPSE OF THE FUTURE

by

Karen Sparks

Where... when am I? Oh, I'm back. I wanted to stay longer. So many things I should have asked. What of this role he said I played in their past? Now the familiar walls of my cabin surround me - the hologram still needs straightening on the shelf; the unforgiving pile of reports still waiting to be signed - everything here is the same, but I am changed! The memory of his words warms my heart - I know that I am still needed here, and it makes me feel young again.

Spock! I must tell him what happened - if I go to sleep now I'll think it was a dream in the morning, and it was too wonderful to forget. But... suppose he doesn't believe me? He must, surely... Oh, it doesn't sound very credible, but I know it happened; he has to believe me. Oh damn, look how late it is - 02.30 hours. I was gone longer than I thought. I shouldn't disturb his rest - but I so want to share this with him, it's too precious to keep to myself. And at least he will not fuss (as a Human would) and snap, 'Do you realise what time it is?' My hand reaches for the intercom, making the decision for me.

"Spock, I need to see you."

He arrives at the door in less than a minute, alert and in uniform, not a hair out of place, and some tired, still-stunned part of my mind wonders irrelevantly if Vulcans are supersonic dressers, or does he never sleep? He looks completely unsurprised by my summons (as if I disturbed him at this time every night) and brushes aside my apologies, as I knew he would. He sits opposite me, attention fixed gravely and expectantly on me, and suddenly I feel a wave of something approaching panic, afraid he won't believe me and will think I'm cracking up.

I jump as he says my name, and he bids me gently to relax and tell him what has happened. Oddly enough, his choice of words calms me a little - he guesses that something has happened to me. I concentrate my gaze on the floor, unable to face his watchful expression in case it should turn to disbelief. I try to pinpoint the beginning of my strange experience so I can relate events in the right order. My voice sounds hesitant to my ears as I relive the deep depression of only a few hours ago.

"Spock, last night I was feeling... worn out and old. I just felt as if I couldn't carry on anymore. I was tired of always being responsible, having to provide the right answers, dealing with everyone's problems, sick of the endless paperwork - you know."

He nods without speaking, and I know that he does know - he has supported me through these fits of self-doubt and fatigue before. He does not interrupt me to offer his usual encouragement and comfort; he merely waits, patient and non-judgemental, for me to continue - and I feel ashamed that the valued friendship of this man, and that of the third member of our complement, the good doctor, were not reasons enough on their own for me to want to continue in command. I resume my confession haltingly.

"It seemed to me that after all this crew have accomplished, and

been credited to my record - especially after V'Ger and then the probe, that Starfleet would never dare to retire me. My name will be a millstone around their necks, and they'll have to wait until I get senile and start making mistakes - and mistakes I make could cost people's lives. That thought terrifies me. I don't want it to come to that, so I decided to quit while I'm ahead, as they say." I try to smile, to take the sting from words I know must cause him concern.

"So I made up my mind to resign." I wave a hand towards the crumpled paper on my desk. "I'd filled out the form, and I was just about to sign my name..." I pause for a moment as the incredulity of it all washes over me again, and Spock raises an eyebrow slightly, inviting me to continue.

"And suddenly I wasn't here any more! There was this magnificent ship - beautiful, sleek, bigger than I could have dreamed a ship could be - she made our gallant silver lady look like a racing yacht. Her name was The Enterprise. I walked her decks, completely undetected by all aboard her, breathing the air that felt as fresh as Earth's on a spring day. The crew numbered more than a thousand - there were children and civilians, families allowed to be together instead of being wrenched apart for years at a time. Imagine it, Spock!

"I found myself stepping onto the bridge, which was bigger and more comfortable than ours. A constellation unknown to us was displayed on the viewscreen. The Captain's station held my attention - it was not isolated, set apart as mine is, but was flanked by two seats for the closest advisors - and it seemed to me that the loneliness of command would not be quite so lonely on that ship.

"I walked unseen among the bridge crew, watching them, listening to their conversation and delighting in their gentle teasing of one another, studying their unfamiliar consoles over their shoulders. Their navigator was blind, and an android sat at the helm. There was a dark-haired woman who could read the emotions of those around her, a half-alien from a planet we have not yet discovered.

"The diversity was beautiful - until I was shocked to see a Klingon at the weapons console. I cried out a warning and reached instinctively for my phaser, wanting to protect the crew of this Enterprise as I would my own - and a hand closed on my wrist. I swung round to see who could touch me when I had found I could touch nothing on this ship, and when I had known myself to be invisible to all aboard her.

"I recognised no sign of rank on the strange uniform, but the man I faced wore the mantle of command as surely and naturally as I once did, before the doubts and agonies of recent times. He looked wise and compassionate, and the experience of many years in deep space was in his eyes. He smiled at me, and bowed his head, and called me 'Captain'. I did the same, knowing beyond all doubt that he was the commander of this vessel, then I gestured urgently towards the Klingon.

The Captain said simply, "We are at peace now."

I stared at him, disbelieving for a moment, but the trust I could see this man inspired in his crew was inspired in me, and I knew he spoke the truth. And the diversity was even more beautiful. I was speechless with wonder at his words; I reached out to this Captain and we clasped hands, and his touch was sure and firm and warm. It was real.

"He said, 'I am honoured to meet you, Captain Kirk. Your name and those of your crew are legend to us. What you did made what we do possible.'

"I asked if I might know his name, but he said he was not permitted to tell me. Then he frowned, and asked me what the paper I carried was. I looked at my hand and was surprised to find I still held my resignation form. He held out his hand for it, and it made me smile inside, for I could see he was used to being obeyed, as I am. I gave it up to him and he read it, and checked the stardate on it; then he smiled in a sad sort of way and shook his head.

"So this is the reason for our meeting. I never imagined that you were subject to these kinds of doubts. We both know how painful our job becomes at times, but I beg you most urgently not to do this. Your greatest task still lies ahead of you.'

"I was beginning to feel dizzy and very confused. I asked him, 'What did I do? What will I do?'

"He looked almost surprised that I did not know, then recalled himself and told me, 'You and your companions laid the foundation stones of peace between the Federation and the Klingon Empire. You prevented massacre on an unthinkable scale, and turned enemies into allies. It is for that your name is most revered.' He screwed up the form and returned it to me, and his words burned into my soul. 'If you resign from Starfleet now, millions will die in your future who did not in our past, and all of this,' the wave of his arm encompassed the wondrous diversity of his crew and the glory of his ship, 'will never be.' Then he tilted his head as if listening to a voice I could not hear, and said with regret, 'There are many things I wish to discuss with you, but our time together draws to a close. You must not linger now.'

"I said, 'Take good care of your Enterprise, Captain, and I shall of mine.' Our handshake was the bridge between the past and the future, and a silent promise. Then my dizziness increased, his image began to waver and fade, and his hand felt insubstantial in mine. I whispered, 'Live long and prosper,' and he smiled and said, 'I know that you did. Au revoir.'"

I pause at the end of my story, then gather my draining energy to add, "So I have a reason to go on - it seems that I'm not too old for galloping around the cosmos after all."

There is silence in the room now, and I steal a glance at Spock to fathom his reaction. He stirs from the complete stillness he has maintained throughout my narrative and meets my half-fearful glance, raising an eyebrow to make the comment I should have expected.

"Fascinating."

"Do you believe me?" I ask in an agony of doubt.

His gaze strays for a moment to the crumpled form on my desk, as if something about it puzzles him, then his eyes return to me. "I believe you, but I sense you require me to have proof."

"I want you to be as sure it happened as I am!" I cry in frustration. "And I want always to be sure myself that it happened, that the memory won't dim with time so I might wonder if it really wasn't just a dream or wishful thinking. It is a glorious time then, Spock - better, I think, for people like us than it is now. It would

be a comfort to you too to know it will come, and that we were involved in creating their world."

He nods understandingly in response to my unspoken request, and reaches to touch my thoughts. I share my memories with glad relief, and he sees with me the awesome size and splendour of the future Enterprise, the unquestionable harmony of the multi-beinged crew, and their deep loyalty to the man of wisdom and integrity who will command them.

Spock's withdrawal from my mind is gentle and gradual, like a mist dissolving in the morning sun as he tries to ease the intense, aching loneliness of separation that is the price we pay for our rare mind-melds. Now I see reassurance in his eyes as he picks up my resignation form and holds it for me to see, stating,

"Here is your proof, Jim. I should have realised."

"Realised what?" I ask, bewildered.

In reply he passes me a blank report sheet and instructs me to screw it up. Automatically I crumple it in my left fist, a habit acquired in my cadet days to save time when studying, so I could discard spoiled notes with one hand while continuing to write with the other.

"Precisely," announces Spock with something close to triumph in his tone. He smooths out both sheets of paper enough to illustrate the total dissimilarity of the crease lines. He clarifies his point.

"Yours has been simply crushed, while this one has been folded in half and then twisted. In all the years of our acquaintance I have never seen you do that."

I can't prevent a joyful grin spreading over my face. "Then it *did* happen!"

"You are right, Jim. It is a good time." Spock smiles at me (a Vulcan smile) and I see he knows, as I do, that it was no dream, but truly a glimpse of the future.



## TWO FOOLS - AMANDA



If I dared to hope  
That one day  
I might be by your side,  
Would I be a fool  
To believe it could happen?  
Or would you be  
A far greater fool  
For wanting me,  
And bringing me to you  
Upon your strange, new world  
Where I could only fail?

Sheryl Peterson



# NOT THE RIGHT WORD

Doctor McCoy you really should watch your metaphors  
 The Vulcan is far too tall to be termed a hobgoblin  
 That was a little creature that sat on the hob  
 A small round part of the old-fashioned kitchen cooker  
 Nature must have endowed him with an asbestos backside  
 When he was elsewhere the hob held a boiling kettle  
 A saucepan of greens or the simmering stew of your ancestors  
 Its radius was 2.97 inches exactly  
 Far too small for Vulcan or even Human  
 But not too foreign for Spock to compute its area  
 And once more confound you with that irritating precision  
 Unearthly un-Irish un-Southern-Georgian-gentleman,  
 Which could only come forth and blossom on his far planet -  
 Sorry about the metre - it should not have been iambic  
 For glorious Vulcan achievement requires the stately hexameter!

Pac Deacon



# HAPPINESS IS...

When I was young I had a mare  
 With tumbling mane of tawny hair  
 And legs so slender, coat so fine  
 I thrilled to know that she was mine  
 Swifter than clouds that lightly pass  
 She bore me through green fields of grass.

I'm older now, I have a steed  
 Outmatching all in grace and speed  
 Her lines delight my Human eyes  
 She is my ship, my Enterprise  
 Swifter than light, which nothing mars,  
 She bears me through black fields of stars.

But on this ship I have a friend  
 I've learned possession's not an end  
 To occupy a Human soul  
 And tune my mind to seek his goal  
 True to the course my spirit sought  
 He steers me through clear fields of thought.

Pac Deacon